

Victimized Illinois teacher denounces attack on education in YouTube video

Jake Dean
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Ellie Rubenstein, a teacher from Highland Park, Illinois, submitted her resignation in a speech on YouTube last week, in which she denounced the campaign to dismantle public education and victimize teachers. The video received hundreds of thousands of views, as well as hundreds of supportive comments from teachers, parents, and students.

Rubenstein said she and two other teachers had been informed they would be transferred to another school for opposing attempts to replace curriculum with standardized testing and slash resources available for students.

On one of the last days of the school year, Rubenstein and two other teachers were called in over the loudspeaker and informed that they were being transferred because they were contributing to a “negative climate,” which she interpreted to mean their opposition to replacing curriculum with preparations for standardized test preparation.

After being publicly humiliated, she felt like she had no choice but to resign in protest. “This inhumane, insensitive transfer is an attempt to silence my voice, but I cannot and will not remain mute where my students and fellow colleagues are concerned.”

She added that her involuntary transfer was part of the continuous attacks on her fellow teachers. “This year alone I have been a helpless witness as half a dozen dedicated, hardworking teachers were reduced to tears, shame, and desperation after they were handed concern forms filled with false accusations,” which formed the grounds for not renewing their contracts.

Later in the video, she denounced the stripping of funding for public education and the dismantling of high-quality curriculum. “Many exciting learning opportunities have been cut by our district, field trips, guest speakers, exciting events, in-class simulations are

no longer allowed,” Rubenstein said.

She added, “Authentic literature has been replaced by dry uninteresting reading texts and teachers are being forced to do away with constructive projects in order to fit in all those mandates, instructional minutes, and assessments.”

She said she felt completely abandoned by the organizations that were supposed to defend her. “I have been painfully aware that neither my principal, administrator, not even my union will protect my rights or stand by me. There is nowhere to turn for support and unless you are a yes man, you will soon find out that your only choice is to become one or leave.”

Her conclusion that the union would do nothing to defend her is entirely justified. Chicago, only 23 miles south of Highland Park, this week approved the largest shutdown of public schools in US history after the Chicago Teachers Union orchestrated the sellout of last year’s one-week strike by 26,000 teachers.

Last September, Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced plans to shut down 61 schools, a proposal that would require 13 percent of the district’s students to travel longer distances and cost the jobs of 1,000 teachers. This brought the teachers to strike in opposition to the plan, but the Chicago Teachers Union leadership managed to end the strike by pushing through a concessions contract that paved the way for the school closings.

The attempt to humiliate, abuse, and discredit teachers is part of the drive to dismantle public education in the United States.

Since 2008, over 336,000 state and local education jobs have been eliminated. As a result of the latest round of “sequester” budget cuts, 70,000 children will be kicked off Head Start, more than 7,200 staff for special education would be eliminated, and 10,000

more teachers will be at risk of losing their job, according to the White House.

The sequester also imposes a \$740 million reduction in the federal Title I program, which provides financial assistance to poor school districts, and a \$644 million cut to special education assistance allocated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Special education teachers and para-professional support staff are facing mass layoffs and the elimination of their programs in many districts.

The poorest districts are easy targets for draconian cuts and the implementation of privatizations, takeovers, and “turnaround” policies under Obama’s Race to the Top program.

Earlier this year, Washington, D.C. public schools chancellor Kaya Henderson released a list of 15 public schools to be closed in the District of Columbia for this year and next, eliminating 10 percent of all public schools along with an estimated 140 teaching positions.

Just last week, 19,500 California teachers received pink slips, while numerous school districts in Michigan have issued mass layoff notices.



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