It may not exactly be a case of educational vigilantism in the strictest definition. However, in California parents armed with petitions, not pitchforks, are engaged in a heated battle to turn an historically underperforming public elementary school into a charter school, against the wishes of the local school board.

At least 14 states have recently considered legislation that would empower parents to fire principals and teachers at poorly performing schools, or even close the school or turn it into a charter school merely with the stroke of a pen. The controversial issue, commonly referred to as a “parent trigger” has already been enacted in California. Versions are being considered in New York and Texas, among other states.

The parent trigger was conceived by an organization called Parent Revolution. It squeaked through California’s legislature last year. Later last year, parents launched the first effort to force dramatic changes permitted under the law. The target was McKinley Elementary School, in Compton, near Los Angeles. Parents of children attending the school demanded it be turned into a charter school.

61 percent of the parents of children enrolled in McKinley Elementary School signed petitions. However, in May a Superior Court judge threw out the petitions on a technicality: a failure to have each parent fill in the date when they signed the petition.

At the time, both former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan applauded the efforts of parents of children at the Compton school.

So far, no school has been shut down or successfully transformed under the California law, according to a published report in TIME.

While the battle continues to be fought in California, a new front for a parent-trigger law has developed in Buffalo, NY. Advocates of a parent trigger law in New York that would give parents the options to close schools, turn them into charter schools or replace the principal and staff. Reportedly, advocates say a trigger law would give parents bargaining power when it comes to influencing reforms at a school. Those changes could include lengthening school days as well as removing teachers and administrators.

Critics of the law agree parents should be involved in improving schools, but contend a parent trigger law is not the best means to achieve school reforms.

Read more about parent triggers at the following links:

http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2077564,00.html

http://www.buffalonews.com/city/city-hall/article464240.ece