By GERA SUMMERFORD

The new film “Won’t Back Down” introduces a new-to-most concept of parent-trigger laws – laws that enable parents at a school to call for the firing of teachers, closing the school, or turning it over to a private charter school operator.

The film suggests that the best way for parents to improve their child’s education is to use the parent-trigger law to “take over” the school and hand control over to a charter school. The film never takes into account the reality that parent-trigger laws have no track record of success.

While the movie offers a heartwarming story of a mother fighting for her child, it is just that – a heartwarming Hollywood story. The reality is that “Won’t Back Down” is divisive and designed to pit parents against teachers, school boards and the teachers union.

Public school teachers are portrayed as lazy and heartless, school board members as ineffective bureaucrats, and union leaders as obstructionists. These characterizations are irresponsible and inaccurate. Demonizing teachers and education leaders is not a solution. As *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson wrote last week, “Portraying teachers as villains doesn’t help a single child.”

In a time when we all need to work together for the best interests of our students, this film pushes an agenda that is counterproductive to building the essential partnerships among all education stakeholders. Success only happens when we all come together for students.

Even parent groups – including the PTA, Parents Across America, Testing is Not Teaching, and Citizens for Strong Schools – have serious concerns about the spread of parent-trigger laws. Last April, these groups worked against a parent trigger law in Florida out of concerns it would lead to the takeover of public schools by charter school operators.

As a teacher, I know that the best way to ensure student success is through a strong partnership among parents, families, educators and communities. We’re all accountable for student success. For educators, that means reaching and motivating every student. For parents, that means instilling values of respect, responsibility and a love of learning. And for elected officials, it means providing students and teachers with the tools and resources they need to get the job done.

The Tennessee Education Association, educators and school boards across the state encourage parent involvement in education. We believe it is a crucial component for academic achievement, but “parent trigger” is not the same as “parent involvement.”

You did not walk out of the theater after watching “The Avengers” believing a team of superheroes would save the world. I encourage you to apply the same practical approach to “Won’t Back Down.” Enjoy it as an entertaining Hollywood production – nothing more, nothing less.

Gera Summerford is a high school math teacher in Sevier County who currently serves as president of the Tennessee Education Association. TEA is the state’s largest professional organization representing over 46,000 elementary and secondary teachers, school administrators, education support professionals, higher education faculty, and students preparing to become teachers.