

## GIVE PARENTS CONTROL BY ALLOWING THEM TO SELECT THE SCHOOL THEIR CHILD ATTENDS

Every student deserves access to a quality education that provides the knowledge and skills necessary for a successful career and fulfilling life. Unfortunately, many children in America are still assigned to schools that do not meet their individual needs, and many parents are limited in their ability to move to a new community for a different school.

Parental school choice allows families to take education dollars for their child to an approved education provider of their choice. Parents have choices between traditional public schools, public charter schools, private schools, virtual learning, and homeschooling. Additionally, parents can access private school choice through tax credit scholarship programs, vouchers, education savings accounts, and individual tax credits.

School choice options for families have grown over time. Today, there are more than 7,500 charter schools across the country serving more than 3.3 million students. Twenty-nine voucher programs are offered in 16 different states and serve more than 248,245 students. Additionally, there are 26 tax-credit scholarship programs in 21 states serving more than 300,000 students.

March 2020 will forever be remembered as the time public schools in America closed their doors, leaving millions of children and families without on-site school. Their subsequent failure to be more proactive in reopening their campuses created an increase in support for school choice policies nationwide.

Unfortunately, the Biden Administration has stalled progress on advancing school choice policies. The Administration recently proposed an unprecedented

rewrite of the bipartisan federal Charter Schools Program (CSP). The new language gives the Department of Education the authority to act like a restrictive national charter school board, with one-size-fits-all rules. These regulations would severely limit the types of schools that could apply for funding and would restrict any potential expansion of charter school programs. It also recommended to phase out the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program by 2023.

In spite of the current administration's policies, 2021 was hailed as the "Year of School Choice." Seven new school choice programs were created, and 21 existing programs were expanded across 18 states. In 2022, more than double this number of states have seen legislation introduced that would expand educational freedom for families.

The timing of the increase in new legislation empowering parents is a response to what has happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational freedom is a tool that has a proven record of putting students and families first, and parents need to be given the power to choose the best educational opportunities for their children. The heartfelt efforts of these concerned parents at local school board meetings have created a movement and a moment in time when families are choosing educational freedom.

ZIP codes and backgrounds should not determine a child's future. Instead, scaling up choice in education across the Nation can increase competition among providers, reduce opportunity gaps for our more vulnerable students, and improve the quality of education for all children.

## **THE FACTS**

- ★ Just 18% of Americans are opposed to school choice.
- ★ Support for school choice in America has increased from 64% to 72% since April 2020.
- ★ Students who live in states that offer more school choice options have higher reading and math test scores.
- ★ Standardized test scores significantly improve for students who exercised school choice compared to similar students who did not exercise such choice.
- ★ Students who earned a scholarship from the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington, D.C., are 12% more likely to complete high school.
- ★ Florida workers between the ages of 23 and 25 who had attended charter schools earned more annually than students who attended traditional public schools.

## **THE AMERICA FIRST AGENDA**

At the federal level, support policies that:

- ★ Expand education freedom and opportunity for students by providing incentives to fund scholarship awards to cover expenses related to K-12 public and private education.

At the state level, support policies that:

- ★ Enable statewide open enrollment and eliminate school district boundaries, allowing parents to enroll their children at any school in the state.
- ★ Expand access to charter schools.
- ★ Assist low-income families and special-needs students by providing education scholarship accounts.

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## GIVE EVERY PARENT THE RIGHT TO SEE ALL CURRICULUM MATERIALS IN EVERY CLASS THEIR CHILD ATTENDS

The formal authority to approve curriculum for public schools rests with states and local school boards. However, the authority for educating children rests with parents. As such, they should be involved early in the approval process in determining what qualifies as appropriate content for curriculum and lesson plans. Today's contentious debates over using classrooms for political activism rather than teaching a complete and accurate account of American history have reinvigorated calls for greater parental and citizen involvement in the curriculum approval process.

Unfortunately for our students, education activists have sought to introduce factually inaccurate and damaging teachings into our Nation's schools. At the same time, teachers' unions and the ACLU have fought viciously against increased transparency measures. This obstruction is directly counter to the preferences of the overwhelming majority of Americans. When surveyed, 84% of people said they believe parents should be able to see all curriculum plans and materials.

This raises an important question: what are activists so scared that parents will see? Actions speak louder than words, and the answer has become increasingly clear with the rise of race-based policies in schools. Many children are being taught to see white supremacy everywhere, indoctrinated to believe America's foundation was built on racism, talked to about sex and gender identity in developmentally inappropriate ways, and presented with other questionable curriculum. Much of this is happening intentionally without parental knowledge or consent.

A majority of voters believe that school boards do not respect the role of parents. Additionally, nearly 70% of voters believe public schools have lowered

standards rather than demanding more from students, which has motivated parents, activists, and policymakers to demand increased transparency in our schools.

Officials that have the authority to make and approve curriculum do so as stewards of the public's trust. The taxpayers and parents who schools ultimately answer to deserve to know what schools are teaching and how tax dollars are being spent. Resistance to commonsense transparency efforts is yet another example of education bureaucrats, teachers' unions, and radical activists working against the interests of everyday families. Surmounting these hurdles by successfully increasing educational transparency and accountability will restore confidence that America's youth are learning accurate, appropriate content at school that will prepare them for adulthood.

### THE FACTS

- ★ 84% of voters believe that parents should be able to see all curriculum plans and materials for classes their children take.
- ★ 56% of voters strongly support curriculum transparency.
- ★ 68% of voters believe most public schools have lowered standards rather than demanding more from students.
- ★ 56% of voters believe public school boards do not respect the role of parents.
- ★ Curriculum transparency legislation was introduced in more than 20 states during the 2021-2022 legislative session.

## **THE AMERICA FIRST AGENDA**

At the state level, support policies that:

- ★ Mandate that schools and teachers share all curriculum, educational standards, and lesson plans with all current and prospective parents in a timely and user-friendly manner.
- ★ Protect parents' rights to know what their children are learning in public schools.
- ★ Protect parents' voices in deciding what is best for their children through increased curriculum transparency and
- ★ accountability.
- ★ Create efficient processes by which parents can challenge materials that are age-inappropriate or otherwise unsuitable for public school classrooms.

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## ENCOURAGE SCHOOLS TO TEACH BASIC SKILLS THAT PREPARE STUDENTS FOR LIFE AS AN ADULT

The overarching goal of our country's education system is to teach students the knowledge and the critical thinking skills they need to succeed as independent, responsible adults. Unfortunately, education systems today are focused on checking boxes, teaching scripted curriculum, and administering standardized tests. We need to return to ensuring students think creatively and act independently.

Parents and teachers should partner as they work to prepare students for their future lives as adults. The important life skills they will need as they enter adulthood include communication skills, goal setting, budgeting, physical fitness, and time management. Too many students today are simply expected to pick up this information informally and on their own as they progress through high school. But if students are never taught what these skills are and how to specifically use them, society cannot expect young adults to be prepared for college, career, and most importantly, life.

Students need core courses like algebra and geometry, but these courses alone do not teach them everything they must know to achieve success. Many high school graduates finish school not knowing how to create a budget, balance a checkbook, read bank statements, or plan for savings. The consequences of this lack of training often become evident quickly, as many students take out student loans to pay for college. Credit card companies then target college students with free offers for signing up for new cards, and these students accumulate significant debt by the time they graduate.

Several classes could help high school students with their transition into adult life, including courses on financial literacy, career pathways, classical physical

education, nutrition, and mental health. These classes could all be integrated into existing coursework and would significantly help students obtain the life skills needed to be successful in their careers and communities.

### THE FACTS

- ★ 45 million borrowers in the U.S. have a total student loan debt of \$1.7 trillion.
- ★ In a 2018 study, only one-third of adults could answer at least four of five financial literacy questions regarding mortgages, interest rates, inflation, and risk.
- ★ Less than one-quarter of U.S. children ages 6-17 years exercise for the recommended 60 minutes per day.

### THE AMERICA FIRST AGENDA

At the federal level, support policies that:

- ★ Encourage states to use funds from the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act and from Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act for the purposes of:
  - Financial literacy instruction;
  - Critical thinking;
  - Digital literacy; and
  - Obtaining skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education, training, or employment.

At the state level, support policies that:

- ★ Encourage schools to teach basic skills that prepare students for life as an adult.

- ★ Promote supplemental life skills education.
- ★ Develop accountability models that include credit for offering basic skills courses for high school students.
- ★ Implement successful models of classical physical education programs in schools.

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## ADVOCATE FOR TEACHING THE TRUTH ABOUT AMERICA'S HISTORY

Over the past year, parents have been rudely awakened to the deficiencies of many of America's schools. They have noticed a cavalier disregard for their concerns by education bureaucrats, politicians, and activists who seek to impose an ideological agenda on America's children. All too often, they espouse the view that parents should take a back seat when it comes to their children's education, despite evidence of mounting failures by the education establishment.

While teachers deserve tremendous respect for the professionalism they bring to their jobs, education activists have sought to introduce factually inaccurate and damaging teachings into our Nation's schools. Racially divisive policies and theories and false teachings of the American founding are indoctrinating America's youth with an anti-American ideology instead of preparing them for engaged citizenship by teaching rigorous subject matter.

We need honest teaching of America's history in our schools, not a political agenda. Instead of promoting inaccurate and unpatriotic concepts, our schools should teach the true story about our Nation's incredible yet imperfect history. When our students are taught the truth about our Nation's founding, they will be proud to be Americans and will have a greater appreciation for their freedoms and the importance of defending them.

One example of activist, inaccurate teaching is The New York Times's 1619 Project. This project is radical political advocacy masquerading as "journalism" with the goals of reframing American history and challenging national memory. The 1619 Project makes many historically inaccurate claims. While top historians in the country have disputed the accuracy of the 1619 Project, it has still been turned into a curriculum that has been disseminated in more than

4,500 schools across the country.

Contrary to what the majority of parents want, thousands of schools continue to use theories and projects that bring politics directly into the classroom. Some of the most alarming examples include an elementary school in Philadelphia forcing their fifth grade students to simulate a black power rally, the Oregon Department of Education adopting Critical Race Theory in mathematics, and Rockville Center High School in New York giving out a homework assignment that "demonized" the police. And the State of Illinois recently revised its teaching standards to require that educators "[e]xplore their own intersecting identities" and "critically think about the institutions in which they find themselves, working to reform [them] wherever necessary."

Using political activism in our classrooms to tell a dishonest story of America to our children is wrong. Instead, we need to teach the accurate history of America, including our country's struggles, faults, and missteps. America is not perfect, but we have long strived to live up to the founding ideals that make this country the most free and prosperous in the world. Only by teaching the honest American story can we learn from our past faults and failures and rally behind the noble ideas our Nation was founded on.

### THE FACTS

- ★ 75% of parents with K-12 students do not believe schools should teach that "the founding ideals of liberty and equality were false when they were written, and America's history must be reframed."
- ★ 80% of Americans oppose using classrooms to promote political activism to students.
- ★ 69% of Americans oppose schools teaching that America was founded on racism and is structurally

racist.

- ★ Nearly 66% of Americans surveyed believe America's public schools are headed off on the wrong track.
- ★ Just 24% of Americans believe schools are headed in the right direction in terms of what children are being taught.

## **THE AMERICA FIRST AGENDA**

At the federal level, support policies that:

- ★ Ensure no current or future policies link federal education funding to the teaching of revisionist history, bigotry, or any other dishonest teaching.
- ★ Preserve the right for states to control their education systems.

At the state level, support policies that:

- ★ Ensure that no child in public school be compelled or directed to adopt or express belief in or support for bigotry or a revisionist history of America's founding.
- ★ Ensure that public schools teach core texts in American political development—including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of

the United States, the Emancipation Proclamation, and others—and that

- ★ students demonstrate basic civic literacy as a condition of graduation.
- ★ Reform educator certification standards to state that courses that direct or compel students to express support for bigotry or a revisionist history of America should not be approved as counting toward educator certifications.

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