

*the*  
**FEDERALIST**

## **Poll: Two-Thirds Of Republicans Are Worried About Politics In Public Schools**

Will Flanders

May 1, 2019

When Harper Lee, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel “To Kill A Mockingbird,” passed away in 2016, President Barack Obama said, “Ms. Lee changed America for the better. And there is no higher tribute we can offer her than to keep telling this timeless American story.”

But when a high school in Shorewood, Wisconsin planned a drama production of “To Kill a Mockingbird,” it set off controversy over the racial epithets used in the play. Despite a storyline that indicts racism, school administrators in Shorewood cancelled the production, flogging themselves and pledging to do “more outreach to engage in dialogue about the sensitivity of this performance.” The story that President Obama encouraged Americans to tell can apparently no longer be told.

This type of political correctness is, as many know, not an isolated incident. In April, an 11-year old girl in New York was allegedly told that she could not focus on President Trump for an assignment on personal heroes, and was told instead to focus on former President Obama. Schools are even banning the red “Make America Great Again” hats and “USA” chants. Left-wing politics and political correctness are increasingly a feature of public schools, and parents are taking notice.

A Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty (WILL) poll of 1,400 registered Wisconsin voters found 40 percent of parents were either “concerned” or “very concerned” about the extent to which their children’s schools promote a liberal ideology, including 66 percent of Republicans. When asked about their concern over politics in the classroom more generally, nearly 50 percent of all respondents to the poll said they were concerned. That’s nearly 70 percent of Republicans who were polled, 47 percent of independents, and 25 percent of Democrats.

Similar phenomena have been documented throughout the country. The Cato Institute tracks the cultural conflicts that regularly occur in American schools, and according to their research, the nation is dotted with incidents where a family’s values may not align with those embraced in their child’s assigned public school. This is hardly surprising when surveys of teachers have found the profession to be one of the most liberal in the country.

What is perhaps most striking about WILL’s finding, however, is that parents are aware of these clashes of values, and some are beginning to understand the solution lies in providing more education options to families.

According to the results, a parent who is concerned about ideology in the classroom is 6 percent more likely to support school vouchers than a parent who isn't concerned. Just as the failure of urban public schools galvanized parents to demand more education options, the increasingly left-wing tilt in public schools just might fuel a whole new demand for school choice among parents who are sick of political correctness and indoctrination.

It is common for education reform advocates to get caught up in pushing information about improved test scores or college entrance rates. That evidence is important, and should not be ignored. But school choice is much more than that. And focusing on academic success alone misses the new and emerging opportunity to provide better options to parents concerned about the political and cultural environment of their child's school.

The United States is a large and increasingly diverse country. Conflicts between culture, values, and politics will only become more common. This is why a "one-size-fits-all" public school system is likely to exacerbate many of these conflicts, not mitigate them.

With school choice increasingly under attack, it is just as vital for those who care about education quality and individual liberty to focus on the notion that every student has the right to attend a school that won't undermine his family's values. The very health of our nation and a future that embraces pluralism might just depend on it.