



## Viewpoint Diversity Will Get a Boost From School Choice

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With Americans beset by multiple crises, there's at least a glimmer of hope that one problem—the collapse of public schools under the stress of the pandemic—may offer a partial solution to another: the deepening political polarization reflected in bitter fights over lesson content.

As families flee government institutions that seem incapable of offering education of any sort, let alone one on which all can agree, they leave behind squabbles over what students are taught in favor of educational approaches and curricula that better suit their preferences.

"The books have the same publisher," Dana Goldstein wrote just over a year ago in a piece for *The New York Times* examining textbooks in California and Texas. "They credit the same authors. But they are customized for students in different states, and their contents sometimes diverge in ways that reflect the nation's deepest partisan divides."

This was hardly the first time curriculum wars—tracked in detail by the Cato Institute's Public Schooling Battle Map—made the headlines. Michigan officials fought for years over such details as whether students should be taught that the country is a "republic" or a "democracy" and which amendments in the Bill of Rights should be emphasized.

"First, conservatives complained about a draft of new social studies standards for Michigan classrooms," as *Bridge*, a local publication, summarized the debate in 2019. "Then, liberals complained about a rewrite of those standards that appeared to favor conservative views."

Nor has the effort to politically mold classroom lessons faded away in the past year. In recent months, the exiting Trump administration added to the drama with a crude proposal embodied in its 1776 Report to promote "patriotic education" as a rebuttal to a curriculum derived from *The New York Times*'s deeply flawed 1619 project, which emphasizes the roles of slavery and racism to the exclusion of other factors in the country's history. The incoming Biden administration promptly reversed its predecessor's efforts.

"The 1776 Report is a political document, not a curriculum," Patrick Riccards concluded at the education-oriented *The 74*.

"The 1619 Project is a thesis in search of evidence, not the other way around," cautioned *The New York Times's* own Bret Stephens.

The reasons for the never-ending battles are obvious. "Classroom materials are not only shaded by politics, but are also helping to shape a generation of future voters," Goldstein wrote in her piece last January. That is, politicians and activists hope to mold the country of the future by propagandizing the students of the present.

There's no reason whatsoever to expect these battles to become less intense in the future. Americans are deeply divided over politics, values, and the perils they see in each other.

As of 2019, "55% of Republicans say Democrats are 'more immoral' when compared with other Americans; 47% of Democrats say the same about Republicans," according to Pew Research.

"Most Americans (54%) now think that the biggest threat to their way of life comes from domestic enemies," CBS News/YouGov found just last week.

If Americans were uncomfortable with the ways their political foes spun school lessons in the past, imagine their feelings about having classrooms under the control of immoral enemies!