



Teachers Unions Are Becoming a Great Argument for School Choice in the Age of COVID-19

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School choice is an issue Republicans have long supported, and it just became a consensus issue for the public. It is past time to make it a wedge issue in urban districts and suburban and rural districts. Urban school districts were hit the hardest by obstinate teachers' unions preventing schools from reopening. Unions have dragged their feet despite the detrimental effects school closures have on all children and overwhelming evidence that schools have much lower transmission rates of COVID-19 than the community at large.

Several studies show that the presence of a union is a primary predictor of whether schools have reopened. We should all acknowledge that some teachers have health conditions that make them more susceptible to COVID-19. Those situations should be dealt with individually. However, teachers' unions have taken the all or none approach, which is absurd. In some cases, like Oregon, unions successfully lobbied to prevent children from transferring out of public school and into other accredited programs.

In other cases, they have made demands that are political, not health-related. Several large urban unions marched in solidarity with the Democratic Socialists to demand things such as abolishing police and free housing to return to the classroom. One union leader was even caught vacationing in the Caribbean while fighting to keep your kids out of school.

Parents and taxpayers have finally started to take note. As school choice advocate Corey DeAngelis noted from two recent surveys in an article published by the Cato Institute:

Recent nationwide polling from *RealClearOpinion* Research found that support for the concept of school choice jumped ten percentage points in just a few months — from 67 percent in April to 77 percent in August 2020 — among families with children in the public-school system last year. Another national survey conducted by Morning Consult found that support for several types of school choice — education savings accounts, vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, and charter schools — all surged between the spring and fall of 2020. The same national poll found that 81 percent of the general public — and 86 percent of parents of school-aged children — now support funding students directly through education savings accounts.

DeAngelis has been a proponent of letting parents use the dollars allocated for their child in public school to attend a program of their choice, including homeschool, for much longer than the pandemic period. However, he has been noting how COVID-19 shone a bright light on the needs for options in education. DeAngelis believes governments should provide those options by

allowing the tax dollars allocated to your child to follow them to the program of your choice. Now it seems a large share of the general population agrees with him:

If 81% of Americans agree on anything, it is more than a miracle. Even the 72% for charter schools would be considered a landslide in an election for public office. And while state and local governments must pass most programs related to school choice, there are things at the national level that Congress and the executive branch can do to support these programs. Unfortunately, President Biden has already shown he is willing to cave to the teachers' unions in his administration's response to schools reopening.

Both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association oppose school choice measures. The federal government and Department of Education can do just as much to impair school choice as they can to encourage it. Both unions give the vast majority of their donations to Democrats up and down the ballot. In exchange, they expect public officials to protect the unions' control of the public school system.

President Trump once called school choice the civil rights issue of our time. Tying children to failing schools based on their zip code is the most apparent system we have that oppresses more black and brown children than any other. The pandemic also taught many parents the curriculum provided to their child in school does not align with their values. Some school districts are so riddled with social justice programs they divide children by race and assign behaviors to them. Filmmaker and journalist Christopher Rufo has documented these programs in school districts all over the country.

This level of general agreement on school choice is a watershed moment for the issue. It is also no longer merely a socioeconomic issue. Parents deserve to choose from programs that share their values and to have the tax dollars follow their child to that program. School choice is also required to innovate and improve the American education system. A model based on preparing children for the industrial economy of the 1950s is not well suited for the 21st century.

With the pandemic-related issues in mind, at least 23 states have put legislation forward to increase choice. Education and how to fund it should be a centerpiece issue for every Republican on the ballot. The pandemic opened parents' eyes to content, and the teachers' unions showed their true colors. The unions see their job is protecting teachers, their wages, and the public school system — not educating your children.