



As His First Cabinet Pick, Youngkin Names School Data Guru Aimee Guidera to Be Secretary of Education

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Governor-elect Glenn Youngkin announced that Aimee Rogstad Guidera will serve as Secretary of Education. During the No Child Left Behind era, Guidera founded the [Data Quality Campaign](#) (DQC) which focuses on better data gathering to help improve school quality.

In his Monday press release, Youngkin said, “Aimee will be a critical partner in restoring expectations of excellence; overseeing a record education budget to invest in teachers, facilities and special education; rolling out innovation lab and charter schools; and standing for a curriculum that prepares Virginia’s children for a dynamic future and removes politics from the classroom.”

Education policy was a major issue from the beginning of Youngkin’s campaign, starting with parental frustration over virtual learning, educational quality standards, and later transitioning into frustration about Critical Race Theory (CRT) and books in school libraries. [Youngkin has said](#) he will ban CRT, “preside over the largest education budget in the history of Virginia,” and called for increasing parental choice through the addition of 20 charter schools. Educational issues propelled Youngkin to victory, particularly parental rights over what is taught in schools. The Guidera pick is Youngkin’s first cabinet announcement.

“A nationally recognized leader, Aimee is deeply respected for her distinguished career advocating for innovation and choice, data-driven reform, and high standards, and will apply these principles in order to implement the Day One Game Plan. Most importantly, she understands that parents matter, and the best interests of students must come first. Her leadership, intellect, and talent will be tremendous assets as we ensure Virginia kids are the best prepared in the country to succeed, and that they are taught how to think, not what to think. She will help us recharge a system that has settled for too long,” Youngkin said in the release.

In addition to her past work at the DQC, Guidera is currently the president of Guidera Strategy. She is on the Harvard University Center for Education Policy Research Advisory Board. She has also worked as Director of the National Center for Educational Achievement, and worked for the National Governors Association. Guidera’s background probably doesn’t have red flags for Republicans or Democrats, according to Cato Institute Education Analyst Neal McCluskey.

Policy Clues in Guidera's Appointment

McCluskey told *The Virginia Star* that Youngkin's policy of using charter schools to expand school choice isn't a particularly radical move.

"That suggests that he's actually actually moving in probably a technocratic managing the public school direction than fundamentally changing it so that money follows parents to schools they think will best serve their kids. And this selection [of Guidera], I think, is confirmation of that, because from what I know of the nominee's background, in particular the Data Quality Campaign, it's about getting better information out, yes to parents, but also to school boards and policy makers," McCluskey said.

"The nomination of [Guidera] is consistent with the conclusion that his focus is on changing the public schools, not on giving parents a whole lot of options out of the public schools," McCluskey said.

"I don't know that we can see this and expect there will be reforms that Governor-elect Youngkin didn't already indicate were coming," he said, "I think this is very consistent with what he's proposed up to this point, which is largely to work within the current public schooling system and to make it work better for parents."

Despite Youngkin's statements about CRT, Guidera's appointment doesn't match a strong push on culture war educational policy issues, McCluskey said.

He said, "The only kind of disconnect is, I don't see anything in her past that indicates that she has a a lot of history of trying to remove things that people don't like in the curriculum because they're at odds with their values, or they're at odds with how history should be taught."

He said that although No Child Left Behind policies fell out of favor, that was in reaction to top-down standards with penalties for districts that didn't meet those standards. Other ideas from the initiative, like using data to understand schools, aren't necessarily unpopular. McCluskey said he thinks Youngkin wants to provide data to parents about schools, including budgets, test scores, and demographics, empowering parents to push for change locally.

Reaction

The Open FCPS Coalition is working to recall Fairfax County Public School Board members, part of a wave of recall efforts triggered by parental frustration that coincided with Youngkin's rise to power.

Spokesperson Dee Jackson told *The Star*, "We are pleased with the news about Aimee Guidera. She has dedicated her career to education policy and is a welcome change to the current administration and cabinet who put education and children last. Glenn is heavily invested in improving Virginia and the lives of citizens within the Commonwealth and education is at the forefront of those improvements that Glenn has in store. We are number 50 in math and reading according to recent stats and that is unacceptable. We are looking forward to positive changes under Youngkin and Guidera."

In a press release, House of Delegates Speaker-designee Todd Gilbert (R-Shenandoah) said Republican prioritization of education wasn't empty campaign rhetoric.

“Secretary-designee Guidera has the kind of experience parents have said they want in our education leadership — she’s a parent with hands-on experience supporting her children as they attended Fairfax County Public Schools,” he said. “I look forward to getting to know Secretary-designee Guidera and working with her to ensure every student in Virginia gets the high-quality education they deserve.”