

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Geoff Garin and Guy Molyneux
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RE: The Nation's Education Agenda

Hart Research Associates conducted a survey examining public education as a 2022 voting issue and exploring the public's education priorities for 2023 and beyond. We interviewed 1,502 registered voters nationwide from December 12 to 17, 2022, including subsamples of 558 public school parents and 1323 voters who participated in the 2022 elections. The survey's confidence interval is ± 3.0 percentage points. This memo reviews the survey's key findings.

When voters and parents prioritize their goals for schools today, they emphasize the building blocks of student success: strong academic skills, critical reasoning skills, and practical life skills. The goals emphasized by "culture warriors"—like opposing a "woke" agenda or removing "offensive" books—are at the bottom of voters' priority list.

Voters' Top Goals for Schools: fundamentals, not culture war

Top Education Priorities	Least Important Education Priorities
→ Ensure students have strong fundamental skills in reading, math, and science.	• Make sure schools don't teach a "woke" political agenda.
→ Ensure all children, regardless of background, have opportunity to succeed.	• Give parents more say over what children are taught.
→ Provide safe and welcoming environment for children.	• Make sure schools don't teach CRT.
→ Develop students' critical thinking and reasoning skills.	• Remove books & curriculum materials on topics some families consider offensive or inappropriate.
→ Teach practical life skills.	
→ Prepare students to succeed in college or careers.	

By a lopsided margin, voters and parents want policymakers to focus on improving education in the public schools rather than giving parents more choice of schools.

- Just 20% of voters prioritize giving parents more choice over which schools their children attend, including private school education, while 80% say that improving the quality of public schools is the higher priority. Public school parents echo this view by an identical four-to-one ratio (80% to 20%).

We asked voters and parents to prioritize policies for improving public education. Expanding access to career and technical education, addressing staff shortages, reducing class size, and improving literacy skills top the list, while items on the “culture war” agenda, including banning “CRT” and expanding school choice, are least important.

2022 voters and conservative candidates are on different wavelengths on education issues.

Most Important Education Policies	Least Important Education Policies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Expand access to career and technical education and other vocational programs that prepare students for jobs. ➔ Help schools to address shortages of qualified teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, and nurses. ➔ Reduce class sizes, especially in the early grades, to allow more individualized instruction and attention. ➔ Expand literacy and reading programs for struggling students ➔ Increase teacher salaries, to address the teacher shortage and reduce class sizes. ➔ Improve and modernize school buildings, including ventilation systems, to create a safe and healthy environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ban the teaching of critical race theory or “CRT” in public schools. • Give parents the right to decide what children learn in local schools. • Criminally prosecute teachers as child abusers if they teach critical race theory or gender identity in public schools. • Do not allow schools to teach students that they may face obstacles due to their race or ethnic background. • Allow parents to have books they consider offensive removed from school libraries.

One key weakness of the “culture war” agenda is that voters and parents reject the idea that teachers today are pushing a “woke” political agenda in the schools. Voters also see the “culture war” as a distraction from what is important and believe that politicians who are pushing these issues are doing so for their own political benefit.

- Fully 65% of voters (and 74% of parents) say that teachers in their schools generally stick to teaching appropriate academic content and skills education, while just 27% of voters (and 21% of parents) believe teachers often go too far in promoting a “woke” political agenda in the classroom.
- Two-thirds (66%) of voters say that culture war battles distract public schools from their core mission of educating students, while just 34% feel they are a necessary step to prevent children from being indoctrinated with a liberal agenda.

Large majorities of voters and parents prioritize giving schools and teachers the support they need to help students succeed, over parental control and stopping schools from teaching a “woke, liberal” agenda. On this question, voters and parents see the Republican Party as being at odds with their own priority. If congressional Republicans carry through on their plan to relitigate pandemic policies and push “culture war” investigations of schools, they will further demonstrate how out of sync they are with the public on education.

- By a two-to-one margin, voters say their education priority is making sure schools and teachers have the support and resources they need to meet the needs of all students (67%), rather than giving parents more say in what children are taught and stopping schools from teaching a “woke, liberal” agenda (33%). However, just one voter in four (26%) believes that Republican officials share this view, while 57% say Republicans are focused on the culture war.
- By an overwhelming 85% to 15% margin, voters want the new Congress to focus on providing support and resources to public schools, not carrying out political investigations.

Congress should focus on providing schools with the support and resources they need to raise academic achievement, expand and improve literacy programs, provide quality technical and vocational education, address teacher shortages, and provide equal opportunity to all kids. (85%) OR

Congress should focus on determining whether public schools stayed closed too long during the pandemic, and on investigating whether the federal government has tried to erase scientific definitions of gender or has promoted Critical Race Theory and other “woke” educational doctrines. (15%)