

Five Solutions to Help South Carolina Take the Lead on Education Reform

Introduction

American freedom and the future workforce are under attack in education. The cult of indoctrination and socialism are threatening the country's core values that make possible the American Dream for every student. When the Left puts "woke" propaganda over writing, race before reading, and progressivism over prosperity, Americans suffer.

Many states are taking the lead to restore the value of American education. For more than a decade, the Foundation for Government Accountability (FGA) has worked with states to push back against the Left when it comes to welfare, health care, and barriers to work, achieving more than 1,600 policy wins.

Below are some key reforms South Carolina can undertake to become a leader in education.

Establish a Parents' Bill of Rights in K-12 education

Problem: Parents are often unaware of what schools are teaching and what they are neglecting, simply because that information is not easily accessible. This prevents them from making the best decisions regarding their children's education. Creating a Parents' Bill of Rights would outline explicit rights for parents and students, including allowing the recording of teachers, curriculum opt-outs, requiring curricular transparency, and other rights.

Solution #1: Support legislation that creates a Parents' Bill of Rights so that parents have the information they need to play an active role in guiding and supporting their children's opportunities for success.

Ban Divisive Curricula in K-12 Education

Problem: The primary goal of American public education is to cultivate an informed citizenry ready for the workforce. When schools focus on creating political activists rather than citizens proficient in reading, math, and science, our country suffers. Schools increasingly are advancing

the Left's socialist agenda rather than preparing the next generation of citizens for political life and the workforce.

Solution #2: Ban the compelling of students to accept divisive viewpoints that discriminate against others based on prejudice through curricula, including critical race theory (CRT). The primary goal of American public education is to cultivate an informed citizenry ready for the workforce. Legislative action banning divisive curricula in South Carolina's schools will ensure students are learning the skills necessary for success.

Streamline and enhance transparency in higher education

Problem: The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education already publicly reports postsecondary and higher education data to South Carolina citizens.¹ However, the data are not easily accessible for parents and there is a gap in data that are directly related to workforce opportunities for students. Requiring public postsecondary schools to publish data that empowers graduating high school students such as four-year graduation rates, average graduate earnings by degree, and the employment rate of graduates will enable them to make smart, informed choices that positively impact the value they can add to their own lives and the lives of others.

Solution #3: Create a streamlined resource for parents of high school graduates to help their students make the best decisions for postsecondary success. In addition, South Carolina should require that postsecondary institutions report additional student-focused data publicly to empower students to make smart choices about their future.

Reform school board elections

Problem: School boards should represent the interests of parents and taxpayers. Nevertheless, they often lack ideological diversity and do not reflect the political makeup of their districts. Often, school board elections are held off-cycle and are nonpartisan. Several academic studies have demonstrated that nonpartisan elections suppress voter turnout.²⁻³ In the U.S., the state average voter turnout for school board elections was 23 percent in 2021, compared to a 77 percent general election turnout in 2020.⁴ Moreover, nonpartisan school board elections result in elected members that often do not represent their communities.⁵ And research shows that nonpartisan elected school board members hold more polarized viewpoints than their partisan elected colleagues.⁶ Masking behind an illusion of integrity, off-cycle and nonpartisan school board elections allow for a local ruling elite to impact educational outcomes without regard for family and taxpayer concerns.

Solution #4: Make school board candidates declare party affiliation. School boards ought to represent the political interests of the electorate. When candidates declare their party affiliation, voters are empowered to make more informed decisions on the makeup of the local school board. Additionally, school boards often lack ideological diversity. Making candidates for school

boards declare their party affiliation will ensure this diversity and return control to voters so they can make informed choices on how their local schools are governed.

Solution #5: Sync school board election cycles with other major elections and eliminate staggered terms. States should schedule school board elections so that they occur at the same time as other major state and local elections. Currently, South Carolina allows staggered terms and for some school board elections to be held off-cycle.⁷ Staggered and off-cycle terms perpetuate the status quo in education, blocking the ability of communities to change how schools are governed. This will ensure that school board election results reflect the voter turnout for that election cycle.

Conclusion

Lack of transparency, “woke” ideology, and school boards neglecting the concerns of their communities threaten education and democracy in South Carolina and across the country. An oft-quoted line attributed to Thomas Jefferson linking democracy and education reads: “An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.” Strong and capable leaders in South Carolina must stand up to the progressive agenda before it is too late.

References

¹ “CHE Data and Reports,” South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (2022), <https://www.che.sc.gov/che-data-and-reports>.

² Albert K. Karnig and B. Oliver Walter, “Decline in Municipal Voter Turnout: A Function of Changing Structure,” *American Politics Quarterly*, Volume: 11, Issue 4, October 1, 1983.

³ Robert R. Alford and Eugene C. Lee, “Voting Turnout in American Cities,” *American Political Science Review*, Volume 62, Issue 3, September 1968.

⁴ Jonathan Bain and Jonathan Ingram, “Out of Cycle, Out of Mind: Why School Board Elections Should Be Held With Statewide Elections,” *Foundation for Government Accountability* (August 24, 2022), <https://thefga.org/paper/school-board-elections-should-be-held-with-statewide-elections/>.

⁵ Vladimir Kogan, Stéphane Lavertu, and Zachary Peskowitz, “The Democratic Deficit in U.S. Education Governance,” *EdWorkingPaper*, Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2020.

⁶ Evan Crawford, “How Nonpartisan Ballot Design Conceals Partisanship: A Survey Experiment of School Board” (2018). University of San Diego, Political Science and International Relations Faculty Publications. <https://digital.sandiego.edu/psir-faculty/1>.

⁷ “Board member selection and meetings,” South Carolina School Boards Association (July 2022), https://scsba.org/general/aboutus_schoolboardfacts_bdmembersselection.pdf.