

Jan Resseger's February 27 blog: How committed are each state's leaders to democratically governed public schools?

The Network for Public Education (NPE) recently released a 45 page [report](#) on the state of public schooling across the states. Jan Resseger's February 27 [blog](#) sums up the indispensable NPE report on the state of public schools in the current climate of being undermined by privatizers.

Jan Resseger distills 13 findings in the section of the report that examines the growth of school privatization.

How Committed Are Each State's Leaders to Democratically Governed Public Schools?

Posted on [February 27, 2024](#) by [janresseger](#)

Yesterday the Network for Public Education (NPE) released an excellent and desperately needed report on the state of public schooling across the states in the midst of well funded, far-right campaigns pressing state legislatures to undermine support for public schools and expand school privatization through vouchers and more charter schools.

[Public Schooling in America: Measuring Each State's Commitment to Democratically Governed Schools](#) begins: "Neighborhood public schools remain the first choice of the overwhelming majority of American families. Despite their popularity, schools, which are embedded in communities and governed by elected neighbors, have been the target of an unrelenting attack from the extreme right. This has resulted in some state legislatures and governors defunding and castigating public schools while funding alternative models of K-12 education. This 2024 report... examines these trends, reporting on each state's commitment to supporting its public schools and the children who attend them." NPE emphasizes the connection, "between the growing number of 'ruthless and brutal' policies designed to disparage, underfund, and ultimately destroy public schools and the privatization goals of the far-right."

NPE ranks the states according to a rubric including (1) "the extent of privatization... whether charter and voucher laws promote or discourage equity, responsibility, transparency, and accountability"; (2) the extent to which the states oversee and regulate homeschooling; (3) the extent to which each state adequately and equitably funds its schools and whether it ensures teachers are paid a living wage; and (4) the effect of culture war legislation which has prohibited accurate teaching about slavery and our nation's history of racism, curtailed the rights of LGBTQ students, banned books, and promoted an attack on the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Through a complex process, NPE awarded states a possible 111 points. Seventeen states earned F grades, accruing less than half the possible points. Only five states earned As. You may be surprised to discover that North Dakota was ranked first in its overall support for public education; you will not be surprised to learn that Florida came in dead last.

In these confusing times when it is virtually impossible to keep track of the actions of so many state legislatures, the report is valuable for identifying and reporting trends. You will want to explore its overall conclusions and also to examine your own state's support for public schools compared to the rest of the states.

Here are some of the findings that jump out immediately in the section examining the growth of school privatization:

- “Thirty states and the District of Columbia now have one or more voucher programs. We identified 73 programs from traditional voucher programs to tax credit programs for scholarships to private schools, or individual credit programs that support nonpublic school students only. Most states with vouchers have multiple programs.... Ohio... has five programs (the most).”
- “In the states with traditional voucher programs, vouchers may be used in either religious or non-sectarian schools.”
- “Although voucher costs have grown exponentially since 2000, private school enrollment has not—decreasing from 11.38% in 1999 to 9.97 in 2021. This indicates that vouchers are going primarily to students whose families would have chosen and paid for private school costs, thus placing an unnecessary burden on taxpayers.” This is “a gift of tax payer funds.”
- “Voucher students with disabilities lose most of their rights under IDEA when they agree to take a voucher.... Private schools are not covered by IDEA.”
- “Only the District of Columbia requires all students in their voucher program to take the same state tests as their public and charter school counterparts.”
- “Twenty-six voucher states... do not require teachers in private schools that take vouchers to be certified.”
- “Only the District of Columbia forbids voucher schools from discriminating in entrance requirements based on religion.”
- “Half of all states with one or more voucher programs do not require background checks for teachers in private schools...”
- “Although charters claim they are open to everyone... 39 states give enrollment preference to students beyond returning students, siblings, and disadvantaged students. Four states allow charter schools to shape enrollment using academic and talent screening.”
- “Thirty-four states either do not require that charter school students be taught by certified and licensed teachers or allow... many exceptions....”
- “Thirty-five states allow for-profit corporations to manage nonprofit charter schools, including via ‘sweeps’ contracts that allow tax dollars and control to be funneled to the for-profit that funds the day-to-day operation of the school.”
- “Thirty-three states allow owners or employees of the management corporation... that operates the school to serve on the school’s nonprofit and supposedly independent board.”
- “Fraud and mismanagement are often reasons that charter schools shut down.”

The section on homeschooling tracks the growth of this education sector during the years of COVID disruption: “The [Washington Post extensively analyzed](#) states that require homeschool

reporting to track its growth. Their analysis showed a 51 percent increase in homeschooling between the 2017-18 school year and the 2022-23 school year. There was a slight drop-off after a high point during 2020-21, but numbers are still far greater than they were pre-pandemic... Eleven states do not require parents to report that they are homeschooling their children... Only two states, Arkansas and Pennsylvania, have laws to protect homeschooling students from the perpetrators of violent crimes... No other states conduct background checks on homeschool providers... In most states, how homeschooled students are progressing academically is unknown... Only eleven states require that parents have even a minimal education requirement to homeschool—a GED.”

The Network for Public Education (NPE) examines states' school finance according to the standards established and [reported annually by the Education Law Center](#): an adequate funding level, equitable distribution of state funding across school districts, and each state's school funding effort measured against its gross domestic product (GDP). In the new report NPE also compares teachers' salaries across the states. "Florida lost every possible point in this category. It was in the bottom group in all three ELC categories and the lowest group for teacher salaries adjusted for cost of living."

The Network for Public Education introduces the final category---a comparison of states' culture war attacks on public schools---by identifying these attacks as central to an effort to discredit the institution of public schooling: "From the passage of anti-Critical Race Theory bills and book bans to dubbing public schools 'government schools' and 'union schools,' the right-wing forces bent on destroying public education are engaged in a well-coordinated campaign to destroy neighborhood public schools by undermining the public's trust while creating hostile environments for the teachers and the students who attend them." The new report identifies the states that do the best job of protecting the rights of students and their teachers and includes the warning of Dr. Marvin Dunn, founder and president of the Miami Center for Racial Justice: "If we fail to teach black history as it happened and not as we wish it had happened, we run the risk of repeating its worst moments. Teaching our past is not an option. It is a must."

[Public Schooling in America: Measuring Each State's Commitment to Democratically Governed Schools](#), ends with an encouraging summary of states making dogged attempts to protect their public schools: "This year, the Illinois legislature ended its voucher program. Chicago is curtailing charter growth. California has won significant charter law reforms that ban for-profits and give the community more voice in whether charter schools open. Two successful lawsuits in Kentucky stopped its voucher and charter programs in their tracks. Whenever a voucher program is put on the ballot, it is defeated."