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# Education

## Summary and Key Talking Points

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### Policy Proposals

1. Reduce the size and scope of the U.S. Department of Education dramatically.
2. Reject critical race theory in schools with federal funding.
3. Empower military families and children in DC with education savings accounts and equip Native American children on tribal lands with school choice.
4. Decouple federal financing from higher education accreditation, enabling students to pay for individual classes and courses of study that are more applicable to the job market, and eliminate the federal PLUS Loan program.

### Quick Facts

1. Critical race theory (CRT) often leads to segregating students by race or other forms of racial discrimination that violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
2. Individuals with a bachelor's degree earn, on average, \$1 million more over the course of their careers than those with only a high school diploma. "Forgiving" student debt shifts the cost of their education to those who can least afford it.
3. On average, graduate students borrow \$24,000 per year, while undergraduates borrow approximately \$7,000. The wealthiest 40 percent of borrowers hold more than half—60 percent—of all loan debt.

### Power Phrases

#### Equip Families with Choice

- Individuals and families—not government—make the best decisions about their families' health, education, jobs, and welfare.

#### Root Out Critical Race Theory and Gender Ideology

- Parents, not "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) bureaucrats, must be at the center of intimate questions about their children's identity and mental and physical health.

#### Break the Federal Education Monopoly

- Currently, large-scale federal intervention, coupled with the education monopoly in the states, drives up costs and holds back the growth of school choice in the states.

## Reject Unfair Student Loan Forgiveness

- Far from helping Americans afford higher education, canceling student loan debt would enable colleges to increase tuition at the cost of taxpayers, many of whom didn't go to college and can't afford that cost.

## The Issue

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought traditional public education to a standstill, and families across the country became accidental homeschoolers. Nearly 50 million children in public schools were deprived of in-person instruction. The pandemic highlighted how badly families needed options so that their children would not be trapped in government schools that were still closed long after authorities knew it was safe to reopen. It also underscored the importance of education choice in enabling families to select learning environments that align with their values.

School choice has grown rapidly over the past two decades, with 32 states and the District of Columbia now offering private school choice to at least some children, and more than 10 million students of approximately 50 million are eligible for private school choice. States should follow the lead of Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, and West Virginia, which recently established *universal* education choice programs, the majority of which are universal education savings accounts (ESAs). State lawmakers across the country—even in states with school choice programs—should follow this model.

The widespread use of online learning during the pandemic also gave families a front-row look at what their children are being taught in public schools. Many parents were greatly concerned to learn that their children's schools were putting into practice ideas drawn from critical race theory (CRT), sorting their children by race into "affinity groups" and doing "privilege walks," and hiring highly paid CRT consultants to conduct teacher training. Putting CRT's discriminatory ideology into action in schools violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Schools that compel student speech by requiring students to affirm the tenets of CRT are also violating the First Amendment.

Parents should have the protection of parental bills of rights now being adopted in states across the country, including the protections found in the Given Name Act, which prohibits schools from using names or pronouns different than what is on a child's birth certificate, absent written parental consent. Schools should also be maximally transparent about the curricula and training they are using. Curricula should be posted online, and parents should be able to find the materials being taught in their children's schools with a few clicks on the schools' websites.

Some public schools have become steeped in an ideologically driven LGBTQ+ agenda. Some guidance counselors are building "gender support plans" for students, which can lead to "gender"-confused students "socially transitioning"—such as dressing like the opposite sex and using opposite-sex pronouns—without their parents' knowledge or consent. School faculty are also instructed to enforce transgender pronoun usage strictly. It is critical that parents are reaffirmed as children's primary caregivers and that schools receive permission from parents before administering health services to students. Parents must be returned to the center of intimate questions about their children's mental and physical health.

Higher education badly needs reform as well. To limit taxpayer exposure to student loan debt and better position higher education to meet future economic needs, Congress should eliminate the PLUS Loan program, pursue long-overdue accreditation reform to focus on quality assurance, decouple federal financing (student loans and grants) from accreditation to allow students more flexibility in pursuing career-oriented education options, and cap indirect cost payments to universities for research grants. Congress should withstand pressure to cancel student loan debt, which would be regressive, fuel further increases in college costs, and shift a massive debt burden onto American taxpayers.

## Recommendations

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### Policy Proposals (Federal)

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In order to return to a sane education system, federal lawmakers should:

**Reject critical race theory in DC public schools** by prohibiting District of Columbia public school and charter school employees from compelling any teacher or student to adopt, affirm, adhere to, or profess ideas that promote race or sex stereotyping or scapegoating or that violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

**Establish education savings accounts for children in DC and children of military families**, two populations whose education is funded by federal taxpayers and under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Congress.

**Decouple federal financing from higher education accreditation**, enabling students to pay for individual classes and courses of study that are more applicable to the job market and eliminate the federal PLUS Loan program.

**Situate decision-making about existing federal funding closer to the families** who are affected by those decisions. The policies contained in the Academic Partnerships Lead Us to Success (APLUS) Act would accomplish this goal by allowing states to opt out of the programs authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and put those existing dollars toward any lawful education purpose under state law.

**Dramatically reduce the size and scope of the U.S. Department of Education** by eliminating programs that are duplicative, ineffective, or unconstitutional. The Department of Education should no longer have Cabinet-level agency status—a policy goal that can be achieved by eliminating more than 80 existing programs and moving 40 remaining programs to other federal agencies.

**Cap indirect costs to universities.** Currently, the federal government overpays universities for grant-funded research, requiring taxpayers to shell out more than the minimum indirect rate paid for research by the private sector to universities. Not only is this unfair to taxpayers, but it results in taxpayers subsidizing other agendas at universities, such as an ever-growing DEI staff. Congress should cap the indirect rate the federal government pays universities so that it matches or is closer to the rate that the private sector pays for research.

### Policy Proposals (State)

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In order to return to parents the right to direct their children's education and to protect them from ideological agendas, state lawmakers should:

**Pursue universal education savings accounts in the states.** States should follow the lead of Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, and West Virginia and adopt universal education choice. ESAs enable families to take at least 90 percent of their child's share of state per-pupil funding to a private school or education provider of choice. ESAs allow families to pay for private school tuition, online learning, special education services and therapies, private tutors, and a host of other education-related services, products, and providers. Unused funds can be rolled over from year to year and should be eligible for deposit into a college savings account.

**Protect children and families with parental bills of rights.** States should respond to the radical ideologies that insert gender ideology as a replacement for biological sex into K–12 health instruction and adopt parental bills of rights. A parental bill of rights should affirm that parents are their children's primary caregivers, require that schools receive permission from parents before administering health services to students, and allow parents—and taxpayers—to view the material that educators are teaching students.

**Reject critical race theory and its discriminatory application in schools.** States should prohibit schools from applying CRT and violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by compelling students to affirm racially discriminatory ideas. Parents should have a private right of action against public schools that violate these prohibitions.

## Facts + Figures

**FACT: Critical race theory transmits a toxic message to students of all backgrounds, and its application in schools may violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964.**

- CRT can be disguised as “diversity, equity, and inclusion,” “affinity groups,” and “privilege walks,” among other activities that segregate children by race. CRT includes a call to action against the U.S. constitutional system.
- Education officials are obligated to uphold the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause as well as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects Americans from discrimination based on race, sex, or national origin in education institutions that receive federal funds.
- Students should learn about all American history, including slavery, Jim Crow laws, and segregation, as well as the remarkable progress that the country has made, the rule of law, and content that creates a shared sense of national identity, showing that America belongs to all Americans and that this nation and its progress are worth celebrating.

**FACT: Individuals with a bachelor’s degree earn, on average, \$1 million more over the course of their careers than those with only a high school diploma. This makes student loan forgiveness an unfair and regressive policy that shifts that payment obligation onto the two-thirds of Americans who do not hold bachelor’s degrees.**

- Cumulatively, Americans owe more than \$1.8 trillion in outstanding student loan debt—a sum that exceeds cumulative credit card debt. Although the number is large in the aggregate, it is manageable at the individual level for most borrowers. Median monthly loan payments are \$222.
- Student loan amnesty is not the solution. It will likely encourage colleges to raise tuition, particularly if graduates expect student loans to be forgiven again in the future. New cohorts of students would understandably expect their loans to be forgiven, and that expectation could lead to increases in borrowing.
- At the individual level, student loan debt is tough for some, but on average (and despite how it is often portrayed), it is not a crushing burden. The average student loan debt for members of the class of 2018 was \$29,200. Median student loan debt stands at \$17,000 per borrower, and median monthly payments stand at \$222.
- On average, graduate students borrow \$24,000 per year, while undergraduates borrow approximately \$7,000. The wealthiest 40 percent of borrowers hold more than half—60 percent—of all loan debt. Student loan forgiveness would result in lower-income borrowers receiving the least benefits.
- If Congress wants to help, it should pursue policies like reducing federal subsidies that would drive down the cost of tuition rather than shifting debt payments onto the taxpayers. Congress should begin by eliminating the federal PLUS Loan program.

## Resources

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Frederick M. Hess and Lindsey M. Burke, [Does Race Get Short Shrift in Education Research and Teacher Training?](#) Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 6073, April 5, 2021.

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