

AFT MEMO

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To: Interested Parties

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Re: Voters Reject Culture Wars, Elect Pro-Public Education Candidates Nationwide

Voters across the [country rejected extremist politicians and school board candidates running on divisive “culture war” issues](#) in yesterday's elections, as [mainstream parents rallied instead behind](#) those championing investments in [safe and welcoming public schools](#) that kids need to recover and thrive.

In race after race, parents and voters sent a sweeping message that MAGA extremism and the politics of hate and fear wasn't right for their kids and communities. Rather than supporting chaos, confusion and division, voters across [Virginia](#), [Ohio](#), [Kentucky](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Kansas](#), [Minnesota](#) and New Jersey backed those promising real solutions to address learning loss, literacy and loneliness and help prepare young people for college and career.

A divisive agenda of [banning books](#), [censoring history and diverting public money](#) to unaccountable and discriminatory private schools through Betsy DeVos-style voucher schemes proved an anathema to the majority of voters, who prioritize the strengthening of public schools as the best choice for kids.

When public education was on the ballot, public education won. An AFT analysis of approximately 250 races throughout the country, where the far-right invested resources in backing anti-public education candidates, found that AFT-supported candidates in those races won over ***80 percent of the time***. In locations as diverse as [Bucks County, Pa.](#); [Wichita, Kan.](#); [Albuquerque, N.M.](#); and [Aldine, Texas](#); and [throughout Ohio](#) and [Minnesota](#), voters rejected extremist school board candidates and voted in support of candidates putting public education first. Anti-public education school board candidates publicly supported by the far-right 1776 PAC and Moms for Liberty lost over 70 percent of the time, according to an interim analysis of results.

In Virginia, pro-public education Democrats rallied to flip the House of Delegates and retain control of the state Senate, despite Republicans focusing their campaign efforts on attacking educators and public schools. In Ohio, a referendum question on safe and legal abortion that opponents [framed as an issue](#) of “parents rights” passed comfortably, echoing that same narrative's defeat in a previous ballot in August. Reelected Kentucky Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear ran hard on funding public schools and on the rejection of private school vouchers. In

New York, voters backed Proposition 1, which will help ensure students in the state's smaller cities receive the same opportunities as those in other districts.

The far-right flameout mirrors [disappointing results](#) seen in school board races earlier this year, as well as the 2022 midterms, which saw pro-public education governors and school board candidates elected in multiple states—while those supported by DeVos, the 1776 PAC and Moms for Liberty [lost 70 percent](#) of races they contested. The Republican National Committee [admitted last year](#) that its agenda of “critical race theory” and other invented controversies was consistently falling flat.

Polls have repeatedly shown ([Hart Research](#), [GBAO Strategies](#), [Lake Research Partners](#)) that there is a consistency and durability to what parents want: an end to the culture wars and to destructive partisan attacks on vulnerable kids and neighborhood schools. Pundits often elide the fact that [parent support for public schools increased](#) during the pandemic, even as partisan attacks inflamed divisions among the public at large. Analyses have shown that Virginia Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin's election in 2021 had less to do with the views of mainstream parents, and far more to do with a [“silver surge”](#) of senior voters.

The right wing's strategy to use culture wars as a Trojan horse to destabilize and privatize schools through the imposition of universal voucher schemes has been openly embraced by the likes of strategist Christopher Rufo, who [infamously stated](#) in a 2022 lecture at Hillsdale College that “To get to universal school choice, you really need to operate from a premise of universal public school distrust.” Many extremist candidates tried to hide their true agenda during the run up to Election Day 2023, to no avail.

Bucking cynical efforts to blame and shame educators and their representatives, the popularity of teachers unions [remained strong](#) during the pandemic, while support for unions in general has reached a [historic high](#).

AFT President Randi Weingarten said: “These results underline what families have been telling us for the last two years: They don't want culture wars; they want safe and welcoming public schools where their kids can recover and thrive. Where extremists peddled fear, voters wanted hope. Where extremists tried to smear and divide, voters demanded real solutions.

“Voters want government to support them, not ban books, censor history or limit their reproductive choices. They want public schools strengthened. They want good jobs, higher wages, lower costs and investments in transport and infrastructure. They reject division and want to seize the future together.

“Voters saw the extremists for who they were, despite the massive investment from Betsy DeVos, Glenn Youngkin and other deep-pocketed donors. From Virginia, to Pennsylvania, to Kentucky, to Wichita, Kansas, and beyond, we supported candidates with a vision to tackle learning loss, loneliness and literacy, boost critical thinking, teach honest history and hone practical skills.

“The reality is that the culture war agenda is toxic and hurtful, and that voters agree that the path to a brighter future for kids and families runs through the nation’s communities and public schools. That’s the message from last night. Now it’s time to get to work and provide real solutions for kids and communities to help our kids and families thrive, not smears, divisiveness and fear.”