

# **Why Running for School Boards May be a Waste of Time for Conservative Parents and What Should They be Doing**

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More and more parents are waking up to the abject failure of the American public school system and become desperate to take action to protect their children. The threats to their well-being include vaccination mandates, Critical Race Theory, a failure to teach students basic writing and math skills, obscene and unsafe sex education curriculum, allowing “trans” boys to use girl’s bathrooms, and the list keeps growing. Some are calling this the “Mama Bear Revolution.” Bravo Momma Bears.

It is understandable that parents around the country are storming school board meetings and demanding change. Many have announced they will run for school boards and dozens of local and national education reform groups are urging them to do so.

Since it appears that the current threat is coming from elected school boards, the natural reaction is to take the battle to the leftists who have wormed their way onto those boards. But we must stop and think about this. The left has dominated the vast majority of school boards for decades now and a lot has changed since then. We need to ask ourselves if this is the right strategy. Based on my 40 years of working in the vineyards of the conservative movement and focusing heavily on education issues and school board races, I must tell you that I believe this fight is not worth it. It will exhaust us and accomplish nothing and there are better strategies to protect our children and give them a good education.

I have spent years fighting the left on education issues. As a member of the California State Assembly, I chaired the Education Committee and witnessed first-hand how our public schools have been transformed by the left. They no longer exist to create productive citizens; they now exist to create “social justice warriors” committed to transforming America to a socialist society. The entire education bureaucracy, from the teacher’s union to the administrators, are committed to excluding parents from decision making as they know what best for “the children” and they do not care what parents think. Winning a few school board seats will not change that one iota. I have been down this road and I know how it ends.

## **The Myth of Locally-Controlled Schools**

First off, we all need to understand that our public schools have not been “locally controlled” for decades. It does not do us any good if a parent spends time, money and energy on winning a school board seat but then finds they will not have any major lasting impact.

Many conservative leaders do not seem to understand this, but school districts must follow thousands of state and federal mandates. Almost all policies regarding teacher credentialing, testing, textbook selection, academic standards, bilingual education, special education and even the construction of school facilities were centralized over the last 30 years to state and federal education departments. Basically, unelected state and federal bureaucrats are the ones who decide education policy in America today, not school boards, and certainly not parents.

The decisions school board members make today are inconsequential and are generally choices among options created by state or federal laws. While conservatives slept over the last three decades, we lost control of our local schools to liberal state and federal school bureaucrats. And it wasn't just the left responsible for this. It involved a coalition of many groups including the teacher unions, the Democrats, the school board associations, the liberal Republican establishment, and the business establishment.

Yes, the United States Chamber of Commerce and other national business groups played a key role in pushing hundreds of bills over the last 30 years that dramatically centralized education policy in the hands of the Department of Education in Washington D.C. This bureaucracy was created in 1979 as a result of a campaign promise made by Jimmy Carter to the teacher unions, who, in turn, threw their support behind him. Since that time, the Department of Education has massively grown in size and power at the expense of local school boards and parents.

Remember "Goals 2000"? That was one of many massive federal programs that centralized education policy in Washington, D.C. and it was enthusiastically supported not just by the left but by establishment Republicans, including both Bush Presidents, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. They actually claimed centralizing education policy into the hands of liberal bureaucrats in Washington would improve our education system. Of course, it did just the opposite because it destroyed local accountability.

Today, America's students are now out-performed even by students in Third World countries. We have a failing education system which is why employers today hire thousands of foreign workers. American students can't read or write at a world-class level anymore and anyone who tells you otherwise is lying to you.

Nonetheless, in the 1990's I thought I could improve our education system by helping to organize a slate of over 50 school board candidates in my county. This slate resulted in over 25 conservatives winning office and in three school districts, conservatives even took majority control.

Today, 30 years later, I cannot say this made any difference at all. These conservative school board members encountered state and federal mandates everywhere they turned. Not only that, many of them spent most of their time fighting recall efforts and lawsuits launched by the teacher unions, which have the funds to harass conservative school board members full time. Not to mention there were almost daily attacks upon them by the media.

Indeed, all of them spent most of their time on the school boards defending themselves and nearly all of them retired within a few years or were removed by a teacher union puppet in subsequent elections. As far as I know, this was the largest sweep of conservatives to school boards perhaps in the last 60 years, but you would never know that by observing these same school districts today. Like the vast majority of school districts in America, they continue to follow the left-wing agenda without fail.

A classic example was the Vista School District in northern San Diego County. Conservatives won 3 of its 5 seats and one of the policies they championed was to allow teachers to introduce evidence critical of evolution. At no point did they try to ban the teaching of evolution. All they supported was freedom of inquiry on this issue. The left and its media allies went ballistic and for the next two years, that's all they would talk about. Board members were recalled; lawsuits filed, and in the end, the conservatives accomplished little. Within a few years, Vista was back to its union-approved, anti-parent policies and today they're no different than any other school district dedicated to indoctrinating the children to be good little socialists.

### **The Myth of Public Schools being an American Institution**

We call them public schools, but we really should call them what they are – government schools. Government schools were not part of America's founding nor were they ever mentioned by our founder fathers. In fact, public school systems were not widespread until the late 1800's. Before then, all schools were privately operated and most of them were connected to a church. As education researcher Sam Blumenthal has written, this patchwork system of education produced a higher literacy rate than we have today!

And, of course, there are strong moral arguments against public schools as well. The Bible instructs parents to be responsible for raising their children and instilling in them virtuous values. See Proverbs 23:13-14; Luke 2: 48-52; Galatians 4:3-3; Ephesians 6:1-4; and Colossians 3:20-24. The public schools claim to not teach religious values, but they do; they teach the values of humanism and atheism, both religious doctrines. By turning our children over to the public schools, we have allowed liberal activists to supplant the values most parents teach at home.

### **Then What Do Parents Do?**

It is time parents used their influence and networks to create strong private schools and home school networks. Such networks already exist but they need to be strengthened and invigorated. It is shameful that there are thousands of churches in our country which have unused facilities Monday through Friday. If the Christian community were serious about raising the next generation to be productive, law-abiding, virtuous people, then every Christian church should consider creating a school using their facility and if they think they're too small to pull

this off, then they should approach other like-minded churches and go in together on such a project.

If the existing private schools are inadequate, then parents need to start their own school. As I mentioned, it would be wise to approach churches to undertake this project because the facility construction cost is not an issue. Moreover, most churches have a body of educated people who can serve as teachers. I won't get into all the specific details here, but the first thing to do is to form a board of knowledgeable parents who explore all the options regarding facilities, teachers, tuition, textbooks etc. I will say there are tons of resources online to help those who start private schools.

If hundreds of parents residing in a school district were to pull their children out of public schools and enroll in existing private schools – or create new ones – this could lead to a strong and vibrant network of private schools that could band together and cooperate on other things like forming sports leagues, debate competitions, etc.

The idea is to create a network of private schools that rivals the public schools both in terms of academics and extracurricular activities. Moreover, on average, private school students outperform public school students on every measurement.

Then there's the home school option. Most people don't know this but there are almost 4 million homeschoolers in the USA today. Our government can't stop this movement nor can they compel a student to attend a public school. Home school graduates are one of the most sought after students by top colleges because they are light years ahead of public school kids on just about every academic measurement.

Homeschooling comes in many different forms. In some cases, multiple families go in together on this, hiring tutors to cover areas they are not knowledgeable about, and rotating homes where the kids meet. Many homeschool families subscribe to programs online that feature top educators who teach online. There are homeschool networks in almost every city and state that will help a parent figure out how to do this. Some homeschool networks have places during the day where they meet other homeschoolers so the kids get plenty of interaction with other kids. Indeed, there are even private school athletic leagues that allow homeschoolers to band together and enter their league.

Moreover, one of the greatest benefits of homeschooling is that it only requires a few hours a day. When you subtract all the non-academic activities at a public school, there is only about 2-3 hours of real academic learning that takes place. Without all the interference and noise, homeschools can cover the same ground in just a few hours and then the family can use the free time to go on educational field trips like to the local museum, tours of factories, etc.

Lastly, parents can fight for change by getting involved with efforts to pass statewide educational choice laws or initiatives. The cost of private schools and homeschooling may be prohibitive for some families and since our constitution never granted monopoly status to

public schools, every state should have some form of educational choice in place but most don't because the teacher unions typically block such programs.

Most conservative states have passed educational choice legislation but in liberal states, the only option may be to place an initiative on the ballot by collecting signatures, assuming a state allows that type of process. However, this is a major effort which requires millions of dollars with little chance of success in a liberal state.

One form of educational choice is called the "voucher" system in which every parent in the state is essentially given a "voucher" representing a specific amount of public money that can be redeemed at any public or private school.

But there is concern by some conservatives because when state money is directly involved, the state government could eventually use the voucher system to further regulate private schools who accepted such vouchers. If that occurs, then private schools could simply refuse this money but it is a threat that we all need to be aware of.

Another system of educational choice is commonly referred to as "educational tax credits," whereby a family is allowed to write off on their taxes the cost of private school tuition or homeschooling costs. Since this is not a direct government subsidy like vouchers are, the likelihood of government using this process to further regulate private schools and homeschoolers is remote. It's no different than the tax write-off used by charities.

Bear in mind, the liberals have no problem creating hundreds of programs to benefit illegal aliens, transsexuals, unions, etc., etc., but when it comes to helping working moms and dads educate their children, they will not lift a finger because liberals actually believe that all education should be controlled by the teacher's union in a public school setting. After all, liberals understand that they cannot transform America into a socialist society unless they have total control over the minds of the next generation of Americans.

"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, And do not touch the unclear then..." 2 Corinthians 6:17