

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Scott (VA-03)**

Full Committee Hearing | *Education in Crisis*

RHOB 2141

Wednesday, February 8, 2023 | 10:15 a.m. EST

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Good morning. Thank you, Dr. Foxx.

When the Supreme Court decided the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, it outlawed legal segregation in education, and said – among other things – that, “*In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.*”

The Court arrived at that opinion in the context of racial segregation. But, in fact, their analysis was clear: access to a quality education is a right and politics should never prevent a student from receiving a high-quality education. In recent years, Republican politicians have turned our students’ classrooms into the epicenter of their culture wars.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Republican politicians sought to force schools to reopen classrooms for full-time, in-person instruction, regardless of whether it was safe or not.

Then, in 2021, despite schools’ and institutions’ clear need for additional relief funding, Republican lawmakers did nothing to meaningfully help them reopen safely or help students recover from the pandemic. In fact, *every* Congressional Republican voted against the American Rescue Plan, which Democrats passed to provide funding to make it actually possible to open the schools safely, keep them open safely, and make up for lost learning.

Of course, academic scores have been down. Students were out of school for a year – maybe even more. The American Rescue Plan provided the resources to open safely and make sure that we could make up for lost learning with things like afterschool programs, summer programs, counselors, and tutors. Those cost money, and the American Rescue Plan provided that money.

Now, instead of working with Democrats to address the real issues in schools and institutions, Republican lawmakers are prioritizing culture wars and investigations. In fact, the number of bills introduced across the country to restrict teaching about certain topics, or “educational gag orders,” increased in 2022 by 250 percent, compared to 2021.

Several Republican-led states have advanced anti-LGBTQ bills, like Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill. One CEO who leads a youth suicide and crisis prevention organization, said that these bills “only add to the existing stigma and discrimination, which puts these young people at greater risk for bullying, depression, and even suicide.”

Republican politicians have also supported and implemented policies to ban books; censor curriculum and textbooks at every level of learning; and punish teachers for accurately recounting our nation’s history. Worse, we have seen the proliferation of verbal and physical threats at typically tedious school board meetings.

Florida adopted the so-called “Individual Freedom” measure, which banned educators from teaching certain topics related to race. In my home state, the governor established an emergency hotline regarding the teaching of Critical Race Theory in K-12. That dedicated phone line was shut down since there were no complaints about CRT being taught in elementary or secondary schools. That’s maybe because it’s only taught in a few law schools.

Educational gag orders are a distraction and do not address the public’s concerns about the academic success and wellbeing of America’s students. Many of these attacks have been launched under the guise of transparency and expanding parents’ rights. While parental engagement is critical for a student’s success, the bills introduced have been crafted to give a *vocal minority* the power to impose personal beliefs over *all students*.

Even worse, Republican politicians are holding educators hostage by forcing them to choose between extremist views or fully-funded classrooms.

For example, in K-12 schools in South Carolina and Tennessee, Republican lawmakers passed legislation to withhold badly needed funding from schools because of their curriculum.

Slashing support for students has not stopped there.

Republican Attorneys General are suing to prevent over 40 million eligible student loan borrowers from accessing student loan relief while Congressional Republicans are simultaneously introducing legislation that would make severe cuts to programs that help students afford a college degree.

Congressional Republicans are also opposing the expansion of Registered Apprenticeship programs—our most successful workforce development program. We know that 93 percent of apprentices who complete a Registered Apprenticeship retains employment, with an average annual salary of \$77,000. One recent study found that, for every dollar a business invests in a Registered Apprenticeship program, they earn \$1.44 back. These programs are a win-win for workers and businesses, yet we are ignoring the effectiveness Registered Apprenticeships and they advocate for a diversion funding to untested models, called Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs, or IRAPs. IRAPs do not have the guaranteed quality and national recognition that Registered Apprenticeships have.

This Congress, Congressional Democrats plan to reintroduce legislation to help every student reach his or her full potential.

First, the *Rebuild America’s Schools Act*, the *Strength in Diversity Act*, and the *Equity and Inclusion Enforcement Act* will help modernize healthy school buildings so students can learn safely, eliminate inequities in education, and provide families with a legal remedy for students to address disparities in education.

The *Lowering Obstacles to Achievement Now Act*, the *LOAN Act*, will ensure that all Americans can have more access to affordable higher education.

The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* and the *National Apprenticeship Act* will fully-fund evidence-based job training and apprenticeship programs to prepare individuals for our modern economy.

These legislative priorities are rooted in evidence and research and will take into account the real concerns facing students, parents, educators, and communities.

I hope my colleagues on the Committee will stop putting politics over people—and put people over politics—and join Democrats in addressing the most pressing issues facing our nation’s students.