



Statement for the Record
Submitted to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs
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September 17, 2025

**“Opening Doors to Opportunity: The Promise of Expanded School Choice and
Alternatives to Four-Year College Degrees.”**

Dear Chairman Burlison, Ranking Member Frost, and distinguished members of the subcommittee: I am honored to submit the statement below for the record. Defending Education is a national grassroots organization working to restore schools at all levels from activists imposing harmful agendas. Through network and coalition building, investigative reporting, civil rights complaints, litigation, and engagement, Defending Education fights indoctrination in classrooms and on campuses in order to promote the establishment of a quality, non-political education for all students.

From top to bottom, the American education system needs an overhaul.

There is universal agreement that the American education system is in crisis. The most recent NAEP scores – also known as “the Nation’s Report Card” – demonstrated a devastating decline in proficiency across grade levels in the wake of the pandemic.¹ But it is worth noting that these numbers have been dismal for decades, despite the United States investing more than \$3 billion over the past forty years into our nation’s public education system with no noticeable increase in test scores or student achievement. Tragically, approximately 40 percent of fourth graders and a third of eighth graders cannot read at grade level² - a shameful figure for the most powerful nation on earth.

¹ Annie Ma and Tom Feathers, “US high school students lose ground in math and reading, continuing yearslong decline,” Associated Press, September 9, 2025. <https://apnews.com/article/naep-reading-math-scores-12th-grade-c18d6e3fbc125f12948cc70cb85a520a>

² National Assessment Governing Board, “The Nation’s Report Card Shows Declines in Reading, Some Progress in 4th Grade Math,” January 29, 2025. <https://www.nagb.gov/news-and-events/news-releases/2025/nations-report-card-decline-in-reading-progress-in-math.html>

The decline in American education hit home for many families during the pandemic, when living rooms were transformed into classrooms because of remote learning. Parents were dismayed to see what their children were learning³ – and what they were NOT learning⁴ – which led many families to search for schooling options that better fit both academic expectations and family values.

In addition to content concerns, many K-12 schools also face safety problems; from drug overdoses⁵ to assault against both teachers⁶ and students,⁷ parents are justified in worrying about their children’s well-being during the day.

To add insult to injury, trust between schools and families has shattered. Administrators regularly tell students to keep secrets from their parents, as demonstrated by the rise of “parental exclusion policies” that state parents do not have a right to know their child’s gender identity at school.⁸ In Eau Claire Wisconsin, teacher training materials stated that this information must be “earned” by families.⁹ In northern Virginia, Fairfax County Public Schools assisted girls with obtaining secret abortions.¹⁰ Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland removed their opt-out policy rather than permit religious families to remove their children from lessons on sexuality, which resulted in the district’s humiliating loss at the

³ Naomi Schaefer Riley, “The 1619 Project’ Enters American Classrooms,” Education Next, May 28, 2020. <https://www.educationnext.org/1619-project-enters-american-classrooms-adding-new-sizzle-slavery-significant-cost/>

⁴ O’Connor Institute for American Democracy, “When and Why Did America Stop Teaching Civics?” September 2024.

https://oconnorinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/When-and-Why-Did-America-Stop-Teaching-Civics_.pdf

⁵ Aria Bendix, “One H.S. in Virginia had 8 opioid overdoses in 3 weeks in unprecedented outbreak,” NBC News, November 1, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/virginia-high-school-saw-8-opioid-overdoses-three-weeks-unprecedented-rcna123151>

⁶ Mary Walrath-Holdridge and Quinlan Bentley, “Ohio teacher undergoes brain surgery after 15-year-old student attacks her,” USA Today, January 8, 2024.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2024/01/08/colerain-township-ohio-teacher-brain-surgery/72150549007/>

⁷ AP, “10 teenagers face murder charges in beating death of classmate at Las Vegas high school, police say,” PBS, November 15, 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/10-teenagers-face-murder-charges-in-beating-death-of-classmate-at-las-vegas-high-school-police-say>

⁸ Defending Education, “List of School District Transgender – Gender Nonconforming Student Policies,” April 21, 2025. <https://defendinged.org/investigations/list-of-school-district-transgender-gender-nonconforming-student-policies/>

⁹ Defending Education, “Eau Claire Area School District states that ‘parents are not entitled’ to know about their children choosing to change gender identities,” March 4, 2022. <https://defendinged.org/incidents/eau-claire-area-school-district-states-that-parents-are-not-entitled-to-know-about-their-children-choosing-to-change-gender-identities/>

¹⁰ Nick Minock, “Gov. Youngkin initiates criminal probe into Fairfax County schools’ abortion claims,” WJLA, August 13, 2025. <https://wjla.com/news/local/gov-youngkin-orders-virginia-state-police-investigation-fairfax-county-centreville-high-schools-abortion-scandal-allegations-school-approved-funded-bankrolled-student-without-parental-notification>

Supreme Court for the district in June of this year.¹¹ These things are happening to American children – paid for with their parents’ tax dollars – behind closed doors.

Post-secondary schools fare no better: high costs,¹² grade inflation,¹³ and campus disruptions¹⁴ have eroded trust in colleges, underscoring the need for substantive reforms.¹⁵ Ivy League institutions have experienced a noticeable dip in applications – driven in no small part by elite universities’ negative media coverage over the past two years.¹⁶

America’s economy is at an inflection point.

Much ink has been spilled over the impact that technology is having on the American workforce. Many white-collar career paths once considered promising are now being replaced by AI, while high-demand fields are desperate for workers.

Growth areas like the technology industry need computer technicians and cybersecurity experts. Our country’s aging infrastructure needs plumbers, electricians, HVAC technicians, and welders to both build and maintain structures. Our manufacturing base needs mechanics. And our aging population needs health care assistants, hygienists, phlebotomists, and more.

Yet schools aren’t preparing students for life after graduation, because course offerings in K-12 schools and universities alike fail to align with the needs of the marketplace. One Maine fifth grade class spent time marching outside in the cold to chant “Black Lives Matter,”¹⁷ while a Connecticut middle school spent class time on a lesson plan entitled “pizza and consent.”¹⁸ Degrees like Feminist Studies, LGBTQ Studies, Gender and Sexuality, Culture and

¹¹ *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, 24-297 (2025) https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/24pdf/24-297_4f14.pdf

¹² Carter Evans, “How demand and administrative costs are driving up the cost of college,” CBS News, February 21, 2024. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/college-tuition-cost-rise-loans-administrative-bloat/>

¹³ Adam Tyner, “Grade inflation: Why it matters and how to stop it,” Fordham Institute, October 17, 2024. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/grade-inflation-why-it-matters-and-how-stop-it>

¹⁴ Associated Press, “Timeline of the nationwide protest movement that began at Columbia University,” AP, May 6, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinian-campus-protests-timeline-f7cd3abe635f8afa4532b7bed9212b56>

¹⁵ Jesse Arm, “National Higher Education Poll: Americans Distrust Universities—But Back Bold Reforms,” Manhattan Institute, July 13, 2025. <https://manhattan.institute/article/national-higher-education-poll-americans-distrust-universities-but-back-bold-reforms>

¹⁶ Eric Spitznagel, “Kids Are Giving Up on Elite Colleges—and Heading South,” The Free Press, April 22, 2024. <https://www.thefp.com/p/kids-skip-ivy-league-for-southern-schools>

¹⁷ Kristina Watrobski, “Fifth-graders participate in BLM march for Maine elementary school’s ‘civil rights team,’” The National Desk, May 11, 2023. <https://thenationaldesk.com/news/americas-news-now/fifth-graders-participate-in-blm-march-civil-rights-team-at-maine-elementary-school-black-lives-matter-presumpscot-parents-defending-education-pde>

¹⁸ Kendall Tietz, “School District Backpedals Middle School Curriculum That Asked Students To List Their Favorite Sex Acts Like Pizza Toppings,” Daily Caller, February 9, 2022. <https://dailycaller.com/2022/02/09/enfield-connecticut-school-sex-pizza/>

Diversity, and Gender History – even when offered at respected institutions like the University of Pennsylvania¹⁹ – have little relevance in the real world. And when those graduates fail to repay their student loans because they cannot find well-paying jobs, it becomes a drag on the country’s finances.²⁰

Students and families deserve better options.

K-12 public school enrollment has dropped precipitously between 2019 and 2023 – primarily because families are seeking different education options like homeschooling,²¹ private schools, parochial schools,²² and microschools.

As families flee public schools, the desire for alternatives has surged – yet unfortunately, not all families are able to take advantage of these options, in many cases because of the prohibitive cost of such options²³ and in other cases because the marketplace has been strangled by regulations, preventing the creation or launch of new entities.²⁴

At the university level, high school graduates now recognize that a non-trivial number of degrees burden students with debt while failing to provide any return on time or treasure invested; accordingly, individuals are increasingly opting out of college, citing cost and value concerns.²⁵ Enrollment in trade schools has grown nearly 20 percent since 2020²⁶ – which,

¹⁹ Terry Schilling, “Biden Used A Little-Known Rule To Prop Up Useless College Degrees. Trump Should End It,” Daily Caller, July 22, 2025. <https://dailycaller.com/2025/07/22/joe-biden-gainful-employment-rule-donald-trump-woke-universities-terry-schilling/>

²⁰ Max Zahn, “Collections on millions of student loans risk slowing the economy, experts say,” ABC News, April 22, 2025. <https://abcnews.go.com/Business/trump-administration-collect-payments-millions-student-borrowers-experts/story?id=121042858>

²¹ Angela Watson, “Homeschool Growth: 2023-2024,” Johns Hopkins School of Education, September 2024. <https://education.jhu.edu/edpolicy/policy-research-initiatives/homeschool-hub/homeschool-growth-2023-2024/>

²² Jonah McKeown, “Catholic school enrollment post-pandemic: an interview with the NCEA president,” Catholic News Agency, April 2, 2023. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253986/catholic-school-enrollment-post-pandemic-an-interview-with-the-ncea-president>

²³ Rebecca Griesbach, Williesha Morris, Ruth Serven Smith, “How much does private school cost in Alabama? See tuition for 216 schools,” AL.com, July 8, 2025. <https://www.al.com/educationlab/2025/07/how-much-does-private-school-cost-in-alabama-see-tuition-for-216-schools.html>

²⁴ Robbie Sequiera, “Microschools are growing in popularity, but state regulations haven’t caught up,” Stateline, August 8, 2025. <https://stateline.org/2025/08/08/microschools-are-growing-in-popularity-but-state-regulations-havent-caught-up/>

²⁵ Andrew Dorn, “More teens are skipping college; here’s what they’re doing instead,” NewsNation, April 29, 2024. <https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/education/high-school-grads-college/>

²⁶ National Student Clearinghouse, “Vocational-Focused Public 2-Years Lead Spring Enrollment Rise,” May 22, 2025. <https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/nscblog/vocational-focused-public-2-years-lead-enrollment-rise/>

given that the market is desperate for plumbers, accountants, electricians, teachers, and public safety officers, is fortuitous.

Slowing progress on this front, however, is the fact that the Obama and Biden administrations targeted²⁷ many career colleges²⁸ for doing the very thing consumers want – providing a straightforward education – by holding them to standards that elite colleges and universities were not.²⁹ By putting its thumb on the scale, Washington tilted the playing field away from trade schools and towards traditional four-year programs, to the detriment of students ill-suited for such a path.

Thanks to steps taken by the Trump Administration and Congress, the situation is improving.

H.R. 1 – the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” – contains many provisions that set the stage for long-term correction of the education industry.

First and foremost, H.R.1 will ease the financial burden on parents and students, ensuring that more learners are able to find a program that meets their family’s needs. The federal tax credit scholarship program creates incentives for individuals and businesses to donate to tax-exempt scholarship granting organizations in states that voluntarily participate in the program. Pooled money is then provided to eligible students, who can use the funds to cover tuition, homeschool expenses, and more. Should governors decline to sign on, their constituents will quickly realize that their state’s chief executive prioritizes deference to teachers’ unions over student achievement and safety. Another notable provision expands the options for use of 529 savings funds, in turn increasing the amount of money that can go towards educational expenses – further offsetting costs for working families.

As far as colleges are concerned, obligating universities to consider “return on investment” calculations will force schools to take a hard look in the mirror at what programs are being offered to students, and whether the cost of earning certain degrees serves consumers’ interests. The siren song of a college diploma as a “good investment” has lured far too many students to financial ruin – and it’s time college administrators begin to police their own

²⁷ Adam Kissel, “For-profit colleges deserve equal treatment,” Washington Examiner, September 9, 2025. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/restoring-america/equality-not-elitism/3796931/for-profit-colleges-deserve-equal-treatment/>

²⁸ Joshua Q. Nelson, “Largest Christian university celebrates FTC dropping lawsuit, ending years of 'lawfare' from Biden admin,” August 23, 2025. <https://www.foxnews.com/media/federal-trade-commission-drops-lawsuit-against-largest-christian-university>

²⁹ Andrew Gillen and Richard Vedder, “Obama Did Persecute For-Profit Colleges,” Wall Street Journal, February 25, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/obama-did-persecute-for-profit-colleges-11582676219>

offerings to avoid losing access to federal student loans altogether. In turn, fewer bad programs will enable schools to redirect finite resources to more worthy endeavors.

Although battered, the American education system is not beyond repair – but it will take years of concerted efforts to get things back on track. H.R.1 is a solid foundation upon which to build for the future, and for which the nation's families are grateful.