The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Making Schools Great Again Thanks to Trump

By John and Andy Schlafly

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"Back to school" feels different this year, thanks to President Trump's executive orders that remove Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Trump is also restoring the presidential fitness test that Democrats had removed.

Big-name colleges, including the University of Michigan and Columbia University, have shut down or scaled back their DEI centers due to concerns about Trump pulling federal funding from the school. Meanwhile, under Trump's leadership, colleges in red states like Texas, Florida, and Kansas have ended their DEI programs to comply with state laws.

Five months ago, Trump's Department of Education ordered public schools to eliminate their DEI programs or lose federal funding. School districts for the K-12 level were told to certify that they no longer have DEI programs, while universities were informed they would lose federal funding if they refuse to terminate their DEI.

Trump officials gave public schools two weeks to comply. Instead, many blue states ran to federal court to seek an injunction against Trump, and on August 14 federal judge Stephanie Gallagher invalidated and blocked the anti-DEI letters by Trump's Education Department.

Judge Gallagher was initially nominated by President Obama to the federal bench and, possibly as part of an unfortunate compromise, subsequently renominated by Trump in 2018. Her 76-page decision in *AFT v. Dept. of Education* complained that Trump had "initiated a sea change in how the Department of Education regulates educational practices and classroom conduct."

A "sea change" in education is exactly what Americans wanted when they returned Trump to the White House, to focus on teaching basic skills rather than indoctrinating children with a liberal ideology. An appeal is likely of this decision in favor of Randi Weingarten's teachers union.

The percentage of students who are in traditional public schools has declined to 83%, or about 50 million kids, as parents flee from school failures. Homeschooling is growing and may increase further with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve online learning.

Effective September 1, a new law in Texas (SB 12) prohibits DEI in public schools there and requires parents to be notified if their child requests to be referred to by a different pronoun. Texas bans school clubs "based on sexual orientation or gender identity."

In May Texas also enacted an immense school voucher program, which provides $10,000 per student to attend an accredited private school instead of a public school, and up to $2,000 apiece for homeschooled children.

But this program does not begin until fall 2026, and is initially capped at $1 billion. Some conservative legislators from rural Texas who opposed splintering their school system with this were defeated by Gov. Abbott in order to enact this voucher program.

Democrat-controlled Illinois goes in the opposite direction, by lowering its proficiency standards without giving families enough options. Trump has threatened to take over Chicago to end the crime epidemic there, and it would be tantalizing if he could take over the Chicago public schools, too.

Even the editorial board of the liberal *Chicago Tribune* is complaining now about how Democrat politicians are lowering the proficiency standards there. Its August 22 headline shouted, "Illinois moves the goalposts on reading, math and science."

"Now, scoring an 18 in English language arts and a 19 in math on the ACT will count as 'proficient' for high school juniors." But an 18 is below the national average and far below the score of 30 to 34 that most freshmen at the University of Illinois attain.

Missouri enacted a statewide ban on all personal cell phones, smart watches, headphones, and tablets by public school students, with limited exceptions such as emergencies. School districts and teachers are welcoming this law and its implementation for this school year.

As to physical fitness, President Obama ended that test for public school students in 2012, which Trump is restoring so that students can again be asked to run a mile or do situps and pushups to demonstrate their physical fitness. For more than 50 years this test was given to public school students annually in gymnasiums.

Obama's termination of the fitness test was part of the harmful shift away from competition and individual merit in education. The Democrat Party has abandoned the vision of President John F. Kennedy, who sought a stronger America and even wrote an essay for *Sports Illustrated* entitled "The Soft American."

Trump inherits a nation of children who are badly out of shape, obese, and plagued by health problems. At least 20% of schoolchildren are obese, according to the CDC, and 77% of young adults are unfit to serve in the United States Armed Forces.

Chronic absenteeism has shot up to 25% of students in some school districts. A quarter of student enrollment did not show up for more than 10% of the school days last year.

John and Andy Schlafly are sons of Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) and lead the continuing Phyllis Schlafly Eagles organizations with writing and policy work.