The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Congress Should Stop Funding Woke Teachers

By John and Andy Schlafly

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Beginning January 1st, public school teachers in New Jersey will be less literate but just as liberal under a revision to the state's certification requirements. Teachers there no longer have to pass a basic skills exam required in roughly 40 states which ensures literacy and simple math aptitude.

This is a travesty in K-12 education, and Congress should not continue to fund it without strings attached. Congress spends a shocking $119 billion annually on K-12 education, which as of 2022 comprised 14% of its overall funding.

Three decades ago, the Supreme Court plainly held that "Congress is free to attach reasonable and unambiguous conditions to federal financial assistance that educational institutions are not obligated to accept," in its *Grove City College v. Bell* decision. As Mark Twain quipped, "Everybody complains about the weather, but no one does anything about it," and Congress should act on this issue now.

Test scores have not recovered to pre-Covid levels, and students are still chronically absent. There is a shortage of public school teachers not because few want these jobs, which feature many vacation days along with excellent health care and pension benefits, but because cumbersome liberal indoctrination is required for mandatory certifications demanded by teachers' unions to protect their own power.

Regulatory reform by the incoming Trump Administration will be challenged in court on every issue, and likely blocked before taking effect. Liberals will obtain injunctions by activist federal courts in D.C. against every new administrative rule that goes against their playbook, and the D.C. Circuit is controlled by Democrat-appointed judges as seen in the lawfare against Trump and his supporters.

Reforms should be in spending legislation, similar to how Congress ended discrimination by liberal universities against military recruitment by attaching strings to federal funding. The law schools quickly complied to keep the federal money flowing, after the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the condition of accepting military recruitment on taking federal money in *Rumsfeld v. FAIR* (2006).

Congress should condition its funding of public grade and high schools on giving parents more control, such as choosing or firing the principals in their schools and having veto

power over objectionable DEI or transgender indoctrination. Schools should be required to inform parents immediately of any transgender requests by their children.

School choice is not a cure-all, as it just failed in three recent ballot initiatives due to opposition by rural Republicans who do not want to divide their limited resources among multiple schools in sparse populations. Voters just rejected taxpayer funding of private schools in Colorado, Nebraska, and Kentucky.

But classical schools, which are thriving in Florida and Texas, are winning. Florida has established an alternative certification process for teachers at these schools, which emphasize the subjects on which Western civilization was built such as basic skills plus advanced topics like Latin, physics, and calculus.

There are 250 classical schools that have opened nationwide since 2020, and this approach has become so popular that last month a school board in south Florida voted to convert a campus into a classical school. Florida enacted a new law last April to make it easier for these classical schools to bypass the union-controlled certification process, overcoming opposition by Florida's largest teachers' union.

With conservative teacher certification, there are more than 50 classical Florida schools teaching 13,892 students. Florida's Education Commissioner, Manny Diaz Jr., pointed out in support of classical schools that "I have yet to find a school that is going to put teachers in the classrooms that are not going to be in the best interest of students, and certainly not going to be in the best interest of the performance of their school."

Meanwhile in New Jersey public schools teachers must complete a Leftist preparation program, as accredited at only liberal-controlled schools, plus a burdensome requirement of 175 field hours. This typically takes an unreasonable one to two years, which means that successful STEM professionals cannot retire or take time off to teach immediately in public schools.

As in New Jersey, a few years ago Democrat-controlled New York State also ended its requirement that public school teachers pass the basic skills exam, known as the Praxis Core Test. New York eliminated this in order to promote DEI in its hiring of teachers, in contrast with McDonald's that just abandoned the DEI agenda for its huge workforce.

Half of science and math majors indicate their interest in becoming a teacher, and high school pay in these high-demand subjects is better than many college faculty salaries. Yet a severe shortage of high school STEM teachers persists due to union-demanded certification burdens.

Rather than cut the red tape hindering certification of competent teachers, liberals drop testing requirements for basic proficiency skills. The Republican Congress should end this woke approach to education.

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