

A critique of the Republican Party platform on education

Terry Gilbert • 07/25/2022

I have concluded after reading the 2022 Idaho Republican platform on education that it could have been enthusiastically adopted by the Southern segregationists of the 1950s. It would be equally popular with the anti-public school libertarians and fatcat privateers of today.

It is a document written in anticipation of eventually replacing public schools with a hodgepodge of charter schools, homeschools, private and parochial schools. It clearly reveals a long-term strategy on the part of Idaho Republicans of attacking public education and public educators so that our citizens look with disfavor on our public education system.

The GOP platform calls for encouraging the non-use of public schools and other forms of so-called “parents’ choice,” and references non-public education options throughout the document. In other words, Idaho Republicans want public money to go to private, for-profit schools. The Republican Far Right platform could have been dictated – and probably was – by the Idaho Freedom Foundation.

In recent months, we have all become quite aware of continuing attempts by Republicans to indoctrinate the public by claiming that Idaho teachers are educating our students in critical race theory, an imaginary threat created to scare parents. The irony is that this platform itself is a classic case of indoctrination. Consider the following fuzzy criticisms that the platform leaves undefined:

- “Social-emotional learning,” which, in the real world, means helping students learn critical life skills such as self-management.
- “Diversity,” which, in the real world, means learning to accept people other than one’s immediate family and friends, a crucial attitude in a nation of 330 million people.
- “Equity,” which, in the real world, means striving for justice for all, and the list goes on.

In other words, the Idaho GOP platform tilts at educational windmills and attempts to describe positive educational outcomes as somehow threatening. At the same time, it refers in a positive light to “replacement theory,” which is a White Nationalist call to restrict our country to whites only, and “queer theory,” which encourages hatred of gay and lesbian citizens who are worthy of our love and support.

The platform professes support for “fair and equitable funding.” It sounds good, but the language refers not to funding of our public education system – the cornerstone of our democracy – but rather of funding for individual students.

True equitable funding has not been a hallmark of Republican legislators for some time now. Indeed, just this year, they cheated our children and their families by amassing a huge surplus while pushing the cost of education onto homeowners once again, through never-ending school bonds and levies.

The GOP platform totally fails to address the need to maintain our public school buildings. Why does the Legislature continue to ignore the Idaho Supreme Court, which ruled way back in 2005 that Idaho’s funding of educational facilities was

wholly inadequate to meet its Constitutional mandate? Indeed, a recent study revealed that after all these years of neglect it would now take \$874 million just to bring our public school facilities up to acceptable standards.

The platform is similarly silent on a whole host of educational issues, including threats to libraries and librarians, attacks on students' freedom to read, and the fact that Idaho is one of only six states that do not offer any funding for preschool even while 57% of Idaho children under age six live with parents who work outside the home.

In sum, one may wish to read the Idaho Democratic Party education platform to get a broader understanding of the issues facing our public schools and their possible solutions.



About Terry Gilbert

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Anxiety is meant to prepare us for action, so channel the worries you are feeling into something proactive you can do. Paint. Write poetry. Volunteer in the community.

