

# Threats to Public Education in Our States & Communities

An Analysis of Project 2025





# Introduction

IDRA believes every young person should have access to excellent public schools that support students' academic success and overall well-being and prepare them to succeed in college and life.

There have always been competing ideas about the purpose of public education, what students should learn, who deserves access, and the role of public schools in shaping our society. Currently, there are deep and fundamental differences in these ideas.

IDRA created this guide to help our community better understand our vision for students and our public education system and to address some of the prominent challenges to that vision, including Project 2025 and similar agendas.

This explainer gives an overview of some of the major education policy proposals in Project 2025 and their potential impact on students, states and school districts. For this analysis, we drew upon our deep expertise in school funding, school discipline, access to higher education, culturally-sustaining curriculum and instructional methods, student leadership and family engagement, and educational programs for emergent bilingual (English learner) students.

We hope this document will help students, families, teachers, policymakers and other advocates develop thoughtful strategies for supporting excellent public schools and fighting back against efforts to defund, demonize and privatize our public education system at the expense of our nation's children.





# Connect

Please continue to stay connected with IDRA for more resources in the coming months analyzing the impacts of proposed changes to federal and state education policy.

For more information about IDRA's work, including our federal and state policy advocacy, contact Morgan Craven, IDRA's National Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement, at [morgan.craven@idra.org](mailto:morgan.craven@idra.org).

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See IDRA's [education policy website](#) for deep expertise

See how we support [student leadership](#)

See how IDRA [engages with families](#)

See our [toolkits for educators](#) on curriculum and instruction

See our [SEEN \(Southern Education Equity Network\)](#) website for advocacy tools, model policies and inclusive classroom lesson plans

# Explore



# IDRA's Vision for Public Education

An effective school is one where all students feel welcomed, valued, and, above all, achieve both academically and socially. These schools have strong leadership and advocacy for equity and excellence of education for all students, a strong partnership with parents and community, a cadre of caring and qualified teachers and support staff, engaged students in learning, an inclusive program of extracurricular activities that provide students with opportunities to develop their talents, and a relevant and rigorous curricula that provide the blueprint of quality education.

Since 1973, IDRA has worked to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college and life. Every aspect of our work is guided by a set of deeply held beliefs about the inherent value of all children and the power and promise of public schools.

**All children are valuable; none is expendable.**

Like IDRA, all public schools should be committed to an asset-based philosophy, respecting the knowledge and skills of all individuals and supporting the strengths of the students and families in their schools. Expectations for student achievement should match this belief.

**Public schools must prepare all students to access and succeed in college.**

A college education expands learning, career and life opportunities. Our country cannot thrive, lead and grow without ensuring public schools are preparing all students to access and succeed in college. All students must have access to truthful, diverse and accessible curricula, rigorous educational programs, high-quality learning materials, strong educators, and meaningful leadership opportunities. Schools must receive the support they need to take responsibility for the academic and social success of every student.

**All students must have equal access and inclusion in learning programs and activities.**

Schools must ensure the full participation of all students in learning programs and activities. This means complying with civil rights laws that protect access to equal educational opportunities and creating environments that affirm every student's racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, linguistic and other identities.

**Public schools must engage authentically with families and communities.**

Family and community engagement in education is critical to school success. Traditional notions of parent volunteerism – as free resources for schools and fundraisers – while important, are not enough. Families must be part of changing educational policy and practice in their schools, districts and states.

**We are all accountable for learner success.**

Public schools must have the resources to serve all students. Policymakers, families, communities and advocates have a role to play in ensuring a strong public education system that is fully and equitably resourced and held accountable for the academic and social success of every young person.



# A Competing Vision: Project 2025

Project 2025 is a coalition of more than 100 conservative organizations seeking to shape American policy, politics and society to conform to their worldview. Organized by the Heritage Foundation, the group has compiled a playbook of policy and staffing recommendations designed to dismantle core aspects of federal governance and influence local, state and national policies that impact every aspect of our lives, including our public education system.

Though Project 2025's policy playbook was published in 2023, it has gained prominence recently because it was designed to specifically shape the agenda of a conservative president should one be elected this year.

To that end, we should see Project 2025 as a set of ideals and strategies that is meaningful in this political moment and more likely to be pursued should a candidate with an aligned vision win the presidency.

It is also essential to recognize the agenda as a well-funded and -coordinated articulation of a decades-long effort to influence our political system and undermine civil rights protections for the diverse communities that form this country. The Heritage Foundation boasts that the core policy positions that shaped Project 2025 have been used to influence conservative policymaking since the administration of President Reagan.

The ideological roots of the movement run farther back than even the 1980s and influence other organization's policy positions, too. We will likely have to contend with Project 2025 and similar efforts for some time.

These agendas propose many extreme changes to our public education system. They serve as a policy, legal and personnel guide for those who seek to undermine long-standing protections that ensure all students have access to equal educational opportunities.

Project 2025, for example, proposes completely dismantling the U.S. Department of Education and eliminating, reducing and shifting that department's key functions. This would sabotage the federal government's critical role in investigating and enforcing civil rights laws; providing funding for vulnerable students, teachers and innovative educational programs; and collecting and publishing comprehensive data.

Project 2025 also contains actionable proposals that would radically shift how state and local governments function, how our local schools are resourced, and how students and families are able to safely access public education in their communities.



# Project 2025 Promises to Weaken the Public Education System in Our States and Communities



**Cutting Billions  
in Federal  
Funds for  
Schools**



**Dismantling  
Public  
Education by  
Imposing  
Federal  
Vouchers**



**Compromising  
Civil Rights  
Enforcement  
and Protections  
for Diverse  
Students**



**Failing to  
Protect  
Students from  
Discriminatory  
Discipline  
Practices**



**Erecting  
Barriers to  
Public  
Education for  
Immigrant  
Students**

The following pages present some of the key provisions in Project 2025's policy playbook focused on education and how they would specifically impact states, school districts, and students' access to safe and welcoming public schools.



# 1

# Cutting Billions in Federal Funds for Schools

Project 2025 proposes to shift federal funding oversight to states and phase out several federal programs, including the Title I program. Title I provides important supplemental funding to states and school districts to ensure schools are better able to serve students living in poverty.

Title I funding helps to mitigate some of the inherent resource inequities baked into many states' funding formulas. It supports schoolwide programs on campuses serving high concentrations of students living in poverty and requires federal dollars be targeted to address gaps in academic achievement.

Schools use federal Title I funds for a wide range of services for vulnerable children, including support for students in core academic subjects, literacy programs, and paraprofessionals and other staff.

One recent analysis found that gutting Title I funds would result in a loss of about 180,000 teaching positions, impacting 2.8 million children in public schools across the country (Espey, 2024).

Project 2025's proposal to shift the oversight of these resources to states could have disastrous effects on the equitable and targeted distribution of funds. States

**Gutting Title I funds would result in a loss of about 180,000 teaching positions, impacting 2.8 million children.**

would not be required to use the same federal formulas that Title I uses to allocate monies equitably, based on concentrations of poverty and the needs of disadvantaged students.

A complete phase-out of the funding program would strip our already-underfunded public education system of billions of dollars in federal support and potentially compromise important civil rights protections tied to the distribution of federal funds.

For example, in fiscal year 2022, Texas received more than \$1.7 billion in Title I funds for public schools to serve the most marginalized students in the state, and Georgia received more than \$655 million (Congressional Research Service, 2023). These supplemental monies make a measurable difference for public schools. Children living in poverty in communities across the country will bear the brunt of proposals to eliminate them.



# 2

## Dismantling Public Education by Imposing Federal Vouchers

Project 2025 proposes to defund public education by shifting dollars away from federal programs that enable schools to better serve students with disabilities and children living in poverty and funneling them to individual families to use at private schools or to cover their own educational expenses.

These federal vouchers would be as harmful as the ones we have seen pushed in state legislatures across the country at the demand of conservative billionaire political donors (Lee, 2023; Schwartz, 2024).

Vouchers drain money from the public schools that serve more than 90% of our students. Many of these schools are already dealing with chronic underfunding and budget shortfalls, and though they will lose funding when vouchers are adopted, the cost of operating them will remain (Latham Sikes, 2022).

Vouchers send public taxpayer monies to individual families and private schools. These schools are not required to serve all students and can deny admission and educational services to students, including those with disabilities, emergent bilingual (English learner) students, and students with diverse identities and religions.

**Vouchers drain money from the public schools that serve more than 90% of our students.**

Voucher programs have not been shown to improve academic outcomes for students and instead erect barriers to accountability, fiscal transparency, integrated schools and democratic governance – the markers of a strong public education system that serves all students (Latham Sikes, 2023; Duggins-Clay, 2023).

Voucher programs proposed by Project 2025 and similar organizations would slash funding for public schools that serve all students in our states and communities – including our most vulnerable ones like students with disabilities and children living in poverty – by stripping monies from the very federal programs that are in place to protect them.





# 3

# Compromising Civil Rights Enforcement and Protections for Diverse Students

Project 2025 is rife with proposals that threaten civil rights protections for students and create harmful school environments that erect barriers to learning. For example, the plan proposes to eliminate regulations that protect students of color from being unfairly disciplined and over-identified for special education services and limit protections for LGBTQ+ students.

The plan also proposes new tracking and restrictions for programs that promote diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), which would add to the anti-equity fervor that has dominated some state legislatures and local school boards for the past five years (Wilson, 2023).

Project 2025's proposed changes at the federal level would be detrimental to students, teachers and schools in states and communities across the country in very real ways. Its proposals could increase state and local efforts to ban books and censor curriculum, weaken community faith in public schools, and limit honest discussions in K-12 schools and higher education (see Stanford, 2024).

**We are already seeing these direct and chilling effects in multiple states.**

Project 2025's proposals could eliminate college-going services for diverse students; weaken coursework; and create challenges in addressing identity-based bullying and harassment in schools (Dey, 2024; IDRA, 2024; Duggins-Clay and Lyons, 2024).

We are already seeing these direct and chilling effects in multiple states. In upcoming legislative sessions, we can anticipate more efforts to expand prohibitions on free and critical thinking, classroom discussions and programs for diverse students.



# 4

## Failing to Protect Students from Discriminatory Discipline Practices

Project 2025 proposes disturbing changes to how states and schools manage safety, administer discipline and respond to violations of students' civil rights. The plan urges the next president to use their executive powers to reissue damaging "school safety" recommendations published under the Trump administration and to direct the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice to issue guidance and adopt internal investigation procedures that would ignore clear evidence of discrimination in schools.

In 2014, the Departments of Education and Justice under President Obama issued guidance documents to help school districts across the country address race-based discrimination in school discipline.

The Obama-era guidance advised school districts on how to comply with existing civil rights laws and regulations, provided recommendations to reduce discriminatory discipline practices in schools, and included resources for creating safe, supportive school environments for all students (Craven, 2023).

Importantly, the guidance also advised school districts and families on how the departments planned to investigate potential violations of students' civil rights. Those investigations could take into account the "disparate impact" of a discipline

**Project 2025's proposal to reinstate the deeply flawed 2018 report would result in an utter failure of the federal government to serve its most core functions to protect students.**

policy, allowing the departments to examine whether discrimination occurred if data showed students of color or other students were disproportionately punished, even if the language of the discipline policy itself appeared to be neutral.

These guidance documents helped school districts to identify and remedy extreme disparities in harmful school discipline, particularly between Black students and other students of color, and their peers. For example, in 2020-21, Black students made up 15% of the nation's student population but were given more than 25% of all out-of-school suspensions (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2023).

However, President Trump's administration rescinded the Obama guidance in 2018 in a report that rejected the use of the disparate impact standard and argued, incorrectly, that reducing punitive and exclusionary discipline practices





would only serve to increase school violence (Federal Commission on School Safety, 2018).

Project 2025’s proposal to reinstate the deeply flawed 2018 school safety report and limit the power of federal agencies to investigate violations of civil rights laws—even when they have evidence of discrimination—would result in an utter failure of the federal government to serve its most core functions.

For states, school districts, students and families, Project 2025’s proposed policies would expose Black students, other students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students to increased harmful discipline practices and widen unchecked disparities in the use of those practices.

The proposed changes would discourage the use of research-based school climate and classroom management tools that are critical for supporting teachers and students and ensuring school safety.

Finally, the proposals would deny students and families meaningful access to administrative complaint processes and prompt and fair investigations when they believe their rights are being violated.



# 5

## Erecting Barriers to Public Education for Immigrant Students

Project 2025 and similar agendas contain policy recommendations across a number of areas that would hurt immigrant students and families. In a separate policy document, *The Consequences of Unchecked Illegal Immigration on America's Public Schools*, the Heritage Foundation doubles down on false, harmful anti-immigrant rhetoric with additional recommendations to state and federal policymakers about immigrant students and their access to public education.

The brief argues that educating undocumented children is a misuse of school property, causes classroom management challenges, and creates problems for teachers who must educate emergent bilingual children. Their proposed solutions include requiring public schools to charge tuition to certain immigrant children, with the hope that this blatant violation of federal law would create a path for overturning yet another landmark Supreme Court precedent: *Plyler v. Doe*.

In June 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v Doe* that the right of undocumented students to attend public school is guaranteed (see IDRA, 2022). The court concluded that denying students free enrollment in public schools based on immigration status violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Title IV of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

**We are already seeing these direct and chilling effects in multiple states.**

*Plyler* and subsequent guidance and regulations ensure the right of all children to attend public schools, prohibit discrimination in public schools, and protect the privacy of immigrant children and families (IDRA, 2022).

The Heritage Foundation's proposal to discriminate against undocumented families and deny children access to a public education based on citizenship status relies on state policymakers changing state laws to trigger a responsive federal lawsuit. Unfortunately, leaders in some states, like Texas, are already signaling their willingness to do this, despite the unjust and cruel impacts on the children and families in their state (see Davies, 2022).

This proposal, and others in Project 2025, would not only strip away rights and opportunities for undocumented children and families but would contribute to hateful, anti-immigrant rhetoric that has made life more difficult and dangerous for many students in our states and communities.



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# Connect with Us



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