



DATE: July 13, 2022
TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Education Reform Now Advocacy
RE: New Polling: Reclaiming Education as Democratic Stronghold

Education Reform Now Advocacy and Impact Research recently conducted polling of likely voters in 62 Congressional battleground districts¹ that showed a wariness for Democratic leadership on education and the need for Democrats to embrace an innovative education agenda to rebuild voter trust. These findings present both a wake-up call and a pathway for how Democrats can connect with voters over education. The polling was informed by a series of focus groups² earlier this spring.

- ✓ In a historic reversal, voters surveyed—particularly parents and voters of color—no longer trusted Democrats over Republicans on education.
- ✓ Voters believe Democrats are more focused on student debt relief than on voters' priorities of helping students recover from the pandemic. Voters also think both parties – and especially Democrats - are more focused on race and gender issues than on helping students get back on track.
- ✓ Democrats can make up for lost ground by refocusing on the education issues voters care about the most and by drawing contrasts with Republicans' focus on culture wars and book banning.

The Challenge: Voters are frustrated with a lack of leadership on education—from both parties, but *especially* from Democrats.

- **Democrats trail Republicans on earning voters' trust regarding education issues.** More voters in Congressional battleground districts trust Republicans than Democrats to handle education today (43% Dem / 47% Rep). That gap widens among parents, with Democrats trailing by 9 percentage-points, and voters of color, with Democrats trailing Republicans by 10 percentage-points. This represents a steep drop-off from before the pandemic, when Democrats enjoyed a double-

“ [Democrats] say they're more focused on schools being more effective but none of it means anything to me anymore. It's empty promises. You don't really see a change, I haven't. ”
— Focus group participant

¹ Impact Research conducted the survey of 800 likely 2022 voters in Congressional battleground districts¹ between June 14 and 21, 2022, via live phone and a text-to-web platform. The poll has a margin of error of +/-3.5%.

Battleground Districts surveyed include: AZ-2, AZ-4, AZ-6, CA-3, CA-9, CA-13, CA-26, CA-47, CA-49, CO-7, CT-2, CT-5, FL-7, FL-13, FL-15, GA-2, GA-6, IA-3, IL-6, IL-11, IL-13, IL-14, IL-17, IN-1, KS-3, ME-2, MI-7, MI-8, MI-10, MN-2, MN-3, MT-1, NC-6, NC-13, NH-1, NJ-3, NJ-5, NJ-7, NJ-11, NV-1, NV-3, NV-4, OH-9, OR-4, OR-5, PA-6, PA-7, PA-8, PA-17, RI-2, T—15, TX-28, TX-38, A-2, VA-7, VA-10, WA-8, WI-3

² Focus groups were conducted by Impact Research over zoom with White and Latino swing voters and Black voters who view President Biden unfavorably. Conversations were held between April 23 and May 12, 2022.

digit advantage on education.³ Focus groups of swing voters emphasized a lack of awareness for Democrats' priorities on public education and a perception that educational funding is misallocated.

- **Voters overwhelmingly agree that students lost ground due to the pandemic and think they are still behind.** A majority (87%) of voters strongly agree that students lost ground during the pandemic and 60% say they're still behind.
- **Voters want politicians to help students catch up from missed learning due to the pandemic, but they believe both parties—and especially Democrats—are too focused on addressing how race and gender are being taught in schools.** By a nearly 40-point margin, voters want schools to focus on helping students make up lost ground (66%) rather than focus on issues of race and gender in schools (27%), but they think both parties are more focused on the latter. While voters think Republicans are more focused on race and gender (47%) than on catching students up (33%), they think Democrats are even more misaligned (26% catch up / 54% race and gender). Voters also prioritize helping kids catch up over providing student debt relief by a 54-point margin (73% catching students up / 19% providing student debt relief) but widely believe Democrats are prioritizing the wrong issue in this case as well (20% catching students up / 60% student debt relief).
- **Overall, Democrats are significantly underperforming with a key base—voters of color.** Republicans hold a 6-point lead in the generic vote for Congress. Among Black and Latino voters, Democrats lead by only 5 percentage points—a demographic whom they won by 82 and 36 points respectively in 2018. Two-thirds of Independents are also undecided.

The Solution: To rebuild trust, voters need to see innovative solutions that will prepare students for success in the future.

- **Voters want schools to look forward, not backward.** By a 22-point margin, voters would rather schools focus on preparing students for jobs in the future (56%) than on getting back to teaching the way they were before the pandemic (34%). This margin widens to 34 percentage-points with voters of color (63%). Voters want new, innovative approaches to prepare students for the future, not more of the same that wasn't working pre-pandemic.
- **Democrats are underperforming with voters of color.** Republicans hold a 6-point lead in the generic vote for Congress among voters in these districts and Democrats lead by just 5 points among Black and Latino voters. This is a sharp dropoff among voters of color from 2018, when Democrats won these voters by 82 and 36 points respectively.
- **Republicans have vulnerabilities in not supporting American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding.** Voters were less likely (60%) to support a Republican candidate for voting against ARP funding to increase apprenticeships, skills training, and vocational programs in America's schools to help make sure every kid has a path to a good-paying job.



³<https://www.pollingreport.com/dvsr.htm>



- **One-on-one/small-group tutoring emerged as the most important investments among voters.** Expanding one-on-one and small group tutoring received the greatest support from voters (37% top two). Funding from ARP is designated to support small group tutoring programs. Currently, 20 states are offering some form of tutoring, and President Biden recently announced significant investments to expand tutoring nationally—calling for 250,000 new tutors over the next three years.

Messaging Guidance: Democrats’ messaging on education should be contrastive.

- **Democrats can make up for lost ground by refocusing on the education issues voters care about the most, drawing contrast to Republicans’ focus on culture wars and book banning.** Democrats’ messaging should highlight how Republicans are focusing on censoring school curriculums and banning books while Democrats are working to help kids make up lost ground by expanding one-on-one and small group tutoring, raising teacher pay, and increasing mental health support for students.
- **Democrats can fight Republicans to parity on CRT by making Republicans out to be the extremists.** That means owning the middle and communicating that in tone and messaging. Voters are looking for someone to lower the temperature and put meat-and-potatoes priorities, like helping kids catch up on missed learning, ahead of culture war fights.