

GIVE TEACHERS A BREAK

Cutting Red Tape to
Unleash the Potential of
America's Great Teachers

BY NEERAJA DESHPANDE

Foreward by Beanie Geoghegan



Independent Women is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization advancing policies that actually enhance opportunity and well-being.

GIVE TEACHERS A BREAK

**Cutting Red Tape to
Unleash the Potential of
America's Great Teachers**

BY NEERAJA DESHPANDE

Foreward by Beanie Geoghegan



Table of Contents

Foreward	7
Executive Summary	9
I. Introduction	11
II. A Crisis of Discipline	13
III. End Mandatory Grade Inflation	21
IV. Stop Social-Emotional Learning	29
V. Teacher Licensure Reform	35
VI. Reforming Education for Children with Disabilities	43
VII. Conclusion	51
Endnotes	53



Beanie Geoghegan

Former Teacher, Co-Founder of Freedom in Education
Fellow Emeritus at Independent Women

Foreward

My first-grade teacher, Mrs. Schmidt, was destined to be an educator. Her love for children was undeniable, and her ability to teach them was unparalleled. She had the patience of a saint and the energy of a hummingbird. Not only did she teach me to read well, but she also inspired me to pursue a career in teaching, for which I will always be grateful to her.

As a starry-eyed new teacher inspired by Mrs. Schmidt and others, I couldn't have anticipated the challenges I would encounter. Although my college professors emphasized the importance of fostering a "love of reading," I realized that none equipped me with the tools necessary to teach my students how to read effectively. While the "compassionate" discipline and classroom management strategies they promoted sounded good, in theory, they fell flat in a room with twenty-five energetic fourth graders needing authority, structure, and order.

The issues I faced as a new teacher two decades ago pale in comparison to those faced by educators today: with red tape and bureaucracy, teaching has become far more difficult than needed. If we genuinely want to improve education for American children, teachers must have the training, support, authority, and materials necessary to accomplish the monumental task.

This report from Independent Women shows that we can do so by identifying and tearing down the barriers hamstringing teachers, from the licensure system failing to educate teachers to the state-mandated ideology that has overtaken classrooms.

Teaching is hard, but it is also among the most rewarding professions. I'm thankful for the teachers who have significantly influenced my life and the opportunities I've had to make a difference in the lives of my students over the years.



Executive Summary

If less than a third of children in America are able to read and do math proficiently, what does that say about the schools of the most prosperous nation in the world?

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), released in January of 2025, revealed that a shocking 69% of American fourth graders and 70% of eighth graders aren't proficient in reading, and 61% of fourth graders and 72% of eighth graders aren't proficient in math.¹

Parents and the public increasingly recognize that much needs to be done to transform our nation's school system and ensure that all children have access to a high-quality education. One of the challenges is attracting, retaining, and empowering good teachers. Unfortunately, our current system does none of this well. Data showing that teacher turnover has hit all-time highs in the past five years suggest that the education system is profoundly broken.² The system fails American students by failing American teachers first.

This dysfunction frequently begins with red tape and regulation on the local, state, and federal levels. Subjected to an ever-expanding and ever-changing bureaucracy, teachers today are often barred from holding their students to any real academic or behavioral standards, leading to unruly, out-of-control classrooms in which little teaching or learning can be accomplished.

This doesn't need to be the case, and shouldn't be: America is a special country, in which everyone, regardless of background, has the ability to make the most of his or her life. As John Adams wrote, American education is not "merely [for] the children of the rich and noble, but [for] every rank and class of people, down to the lowest and poorest."³ The American Dream begins with strong schools. By getting rid of the obstacles that are making the teaching profession intolerable, we can help American teachers succeed and finally give American students the educational opportunities that they deserve.



I. Introduction

When opening a 2024 hearing titled “Innovative Teacher Preparation: Properly Equipping America’s Educators,” Representative Aaron Bean (R-FL) said, “I like to consider myself to be a very optimistic person, but I will say this: When it comes to our K-12 education system, we are facing a giant warning.”⁴ He pointed to several alarming statistics:⁵

Far too often, teachers receive the blame for these failures of American public education—per Education Week’s 2024 “The State of Teaching” survey, seven out of ten teachers believe that their profession is viewed negatively by the public.⁷ An elementary teacher from Pennsylvania told Education Week,

86%

of public schools reported difficulties hiring teachers (2023-2024 school year)

16%

of teachers left their schools between 2020 and 2022

20%

teachers say they are very satisfied with their jobs

16%

recommend the teaching profession to others

American students aren’t faring much better: per the most recent 2023-2024 test scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 33% of eighth graders and 40% of fourth graders have “below basic” reading skills, the highest those numbers have ever been in the exam’s three-decade history.⁶ Students made some progress in math, but that progress was not enough to offset the learning loss from the pandemic-era school closures.

“I feel very defeated and am tired of being hated by society. Society does not value my profession and neither do the unions.”

Part of the reason the teaching profession’s reputation has declined can be attributed to social media—namely, the problem of individual teachers filming themselves in a professional capacity (often in their classrooms) making profane and politically charged videos, which

they then post to platforms like TikTok. This is, unfortunately, part of a broader pattern that parents began witnessing in the COVID years, when school closures pushed learning online and parents began seeing the political nature of what was being taught to their children.

As bad as they are, however, these experiences only reveal a small part of the picture. Good teachers are horrified by the reckless and extreme social media posts they see from their radical colleagues, especially seeing that most teachers aren't political radicals themselves: a 2017 Education Week survey found that a plurality of teachers describe themselves as moderate, with 29% identifying as either "liberal" or "very liberal" and 27% as "conservative" or "very conservative."⁸ Moreover, teachers' hands are often tied when it comes to curriculum and content and are frustrated more broadly by a system that tolerates bad teachers and does a disservice to parents and students.

Yet the vast majority of teachers enter the profession because they love teaching and care about children. As a second-grade teacher in Maryland told Education Week for a survey asking teachers to give advice to those entering the profession, "Teaching is a passion, it's not just

a paycheck. You can't fake it. I love what I do. It's more than just a job to me. I want to be the best. You have to commit to that."⁹

Student success is ultimately downstream of teacher success: if we want students to succeed, we should want teachers to succeed. To assign teachers the entire blame for student failure is to ignore the actual goliath in education: a bloated educational system enabled and funded by a bloated government that teachers have little control over or ability to influence.

The public often hears about problems created by teachers unions that make it impossible for schools to remove bad teachers and reward good ones. This is a tremendous, systemic problem that must be addressed in order to restore the teaching profession's reputation as one that expects and rewards excellence.

The policymakers and the public do not have to wait to challenge the behemoth teachers unions. There are other ways to help immediately: By cutting the red tape and the regulations that get in the way of teachers who are just trying to do their jobs, we can make a system in which teachers put their skills to work and enable students to learn and thrive.

II. A Crisis of Discipline

THE PROBLEM

Since the onset of the pandemic, student behavior has deteriorated across the country: per an Education Week Research Center survey, 70% of teachers, principals, and district leaders in 2023 reported that student behavior had deteriorated since 2019.¹⁰ In 2024, the Pew Research Center found that nearly half of teachers overall, and the majority of teachers in high- and medium-poverty schools, are dissatisfied with student behavior, marking it as “fair” or “poor.”¹¹ This problem doesn’t just affect teachers: poorly behaved students, when left to their own devices, drag down their well-behaved peers. A survey from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute found that over three-quarters of teachers agreed with the statement, “Most students suffered because of a few persistent troublemakers.”¹²

It’s not just that students are unable to concentrate when a poorly behaved peer acts out—it’s that teachers are forced to tend to the needs of that one student over the needs of the

rest of the well-behaved students, often leading to a downward spiral of behavior as more and more students get the impression that they can act out as they please.

Unsurprisingly, the decline in student behavior across the country has contributed to the teacher retention crisis: A 2024 study of 2,400 Missouri teachers conducted by the Missouri State Teachers Association found that poor student behavior is teachers’ largest source of stress, the primary reason that teachers leave the profession, and the second largest reason that teachers consider leaving the profession. A whopping 70% of respondents said that “they seriously think of leaving the profession sometimes, often or very often,” nearly an 8% increase from the same survey in 2019.¹³

There is an obvious question here: Why don’t teachers and schools just discipline unruly students? The answer: in far too many cases, the government simply doesn’t allow them to, often in the name of preventing discrimination.

BACKGROUND

The Federal Situation

Over the past decade, federal guidance and Dear Colleague letters from the Department of Education have swung wildly back and forth between presidential administrations, leaving schools in the dark about what they are and aren't allowed to do to discipline students.

Much of the federal controversy over student behavior began during the second term of the Obama administration. Prior to 2014, the Department of Education applied a “disparate treatment” standard when it came to allegations of discrimination: it defined discrimination as difference in treatment and would investigate individual allegations of discrimination that were reported to the Department. For instance, if one black student and one white student were caught skipping school, and the black student was given a suspension while the white student was given a detention for the same offense, the school's behavior could constitute disparate treatment.

This standard, however, changed in 2014, during the second Obama term, when the Department of Education's

Office for Civil Rights issued a Dear Colleague letter (an administrative rule outside of the formal rulemaking process) that applied a “disparate impact” standard: with this new guidance, if the Department saw any racial disparities in discipline numbers, it would assume those disparities arose from discrimination.¹⁴ Now, if two black students and one white student were caught skipping school, and all three students were suspended, the Department—under the 2014 guidance—may disregard the fact that all students were treated equally; the fact that there were more black students suspended than white students may be enough for finding that a school committed a civil rights violation.

The Department of Education's 2014 guidance was inspired by the “Preventing Recidivism through Opportunities, Mentoring, Interventions, Support & Education (PROMISE)” program in the Broward County School District in Florida.¹⁵ The program, which was designed to discourage exclusionary discipline, such as expulsion and suspension, came to national attention when Broward County's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland became the site of a mass shooting on February 14, 2018. Before murdering 17 people in the building and injuring 17 more, the Parkland shooter had a long history



Restorative Justice:
"[A] discipline technique designed to resolve conflict or bad behavior by repairing the relationship between the victim and the aggressor, sometimes involving a sit-down about 'root causes.' This process usually takes the place of more traditional consequences, like suspension, expulsion, or referral to law enforcement."

of serious misbehavior that the school never reported to law enforcement due to its lenient policies, including restorative justice. Inez Feltscher Stepman of Independent Women's Law Center defines restorative justice as:

[A] discipline technique designed to resolve conflict or bad behavior by repairing the relationship between the victim and the aggressor, sometimes involving a sit-down about "root causes." This process usually takes the place of more traditional consequences, like suspension, expulsion, or referral to law enforcement.¹⁶

This was exactly the approach favored by the Obama administration: Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recommended "[i]mplementing high-quality restorative practices" over

traditional exclusionary discipline, which the administration deemed "harsh" and "unfair."¹⁷ Unfortunately, the consequences of non-exclusionary discipline are often far harsher as well as being far less fair: Parkland father Andrew Pollack, who lost his daughter in the shooting, told a local radio show, "The leniency policy, the political correctness—that's a cancer that led up to February 14th of non-reporting of criminals that go to the schools in Broward."¹⁸

In the months following the Parkland shooting, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos rescinded the Obama-era guidance, stating that it had been "a federal solution that undercut the ability of local officials to address the impact of disciplinary matters on school safety." Her Federal Commission



on School Safety also noted that the Obama-era guidance had a “chilling” effect on school discipline. The Commission report stressed the importance of exclusionary discipline (i.e., suspensions and expulsions), and stated that “while alternatives to exclusionary discipline may be appropriate in many cases, it is important for teachers and schools to have the flexibility they need to impose appropriate discipline and maintain order in the classroom.”¹⁹

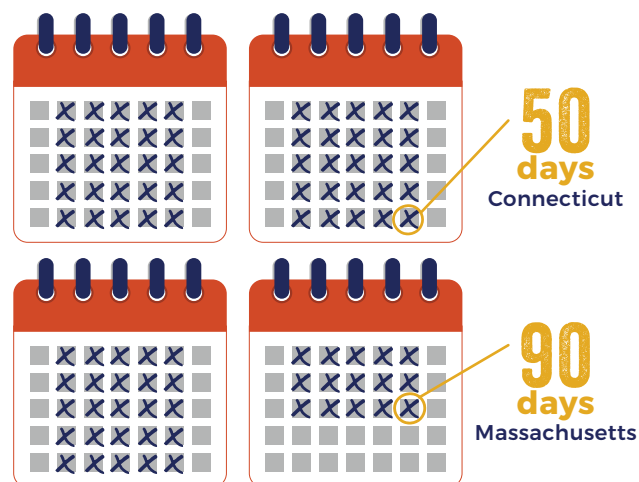
While the Department of Education under the Biden administration did not rescind the Trump-era guidance, it nevertheless issued a Dear Colleague letter in 2023 that promoted non-exclusionary discipline and focused on racial issues almost exclusively, at the behest of progressive activists.²⁰ It did not address the behavior crisis that has only accelerated since the middle of the pandemic when the Biden administration took over, and it continued to recommend failed restorative justice policies.

The State-Level Situation

In addition to the federal guidance, public school districts are subject to state laws. According to a 2021 analysis done by the Education Commission of the States, at least 15 states and the District of Columbia

restrict suspension and expulsion for certain ages and grade levels, and at least 14 states and the District of Columbia prohibit suspension and expulsion for chronically absent or tardy students.²¹

Time in which violent, chronically misbehaving students can return to school



While some of these laws are reasonable (e.g., many states do not allow students to be expelled or suspended for pregnancy), many of them take away a district’s agency with respect to dealing with chronically misbehaving students.²² For instance, Connecticut only allows a student to receive in-school suspension no more than 15 times and no more than 50 days total in one school year. Massachusetts does not allow suspensions or expulsions for more than 90 days—which means that even violent, chronically misbehaving students can return to school in just three months’ time.

The Way Forward

Much of the solution to the school behavior crisis—and the teacher retention crisis—involves the government getting out of areas where it doesn't belong.

As a former teacher told the education news site The 74, “[P]olicymakers have made it so [teachers] have no authority. Only perceived authority. Only as much power as you get your kids to believe. Once the kid finds out he can say ‘F you,’ flip over a table, and he won’t get suspended, that’s that.”***

As a former teacher told the education news site The 74, “[P]olicymakers have made it so [teachers] have no authority. Only perceived authority. Only as much power as you get your kids to believe. Once the kid finds out he can say ‘F*** you,’ flip over a table, and he won’t get suspended, that’s that.”²³ When forced to tolerate such chaos, teachers are unable to teach, and the end result is that the right of well-behaved students to learn in school is trampled on by the actions of their chronically misbehaving peers.

If teachers and individual schools have the ability to discipline their students based on their knowledge of those students, schools are more likely to be safe spaces where teachers are able to teach and students are able to learn.

Empower Schools to Make Their Own Decisions

State and federal policymakers should step away from writing legislation that takes away schools’ and teachers’ abilities to suspend or expel students appropriately.

Insofar as the government has any interest in discipline, it should deal primarily with concrete allegations of discrimination rather than assuming discrimination if there is any disparity, and use the standard of disparate treatment rather than expanding the definition of discrimination to include disparate impact.

Clarify Existing Guidance

The Biden administration's middle-ground position of allowing exclusionary discipline but promoting restorative justice was ultimately incoherent: while, unlike the Obama Dear Colleague letter, it did not stop schools from disciplining students as they wished, it also encouraged schools to use failed practices. Future administrations should align what they do with what they say. Instead of taking a contradictory approach of allowing traditional discipline but encouraging schools not to use it, federal Department of Education guidance should simply leave schools to discipline students as they know best, under the supervision of their state and local jurisdictions.

If teachers and individual schools have the ability to discipline their students based on their knowledge of those students, schools are more likely to be safe spaces where teachers are able to teach and students are able to learn.



III. End Mandatory Grade Inflation

THE PROBLEM

A 2024 survey of 20,000 parents across the country revealed that grades are no longer the number-one factor parents look to when they want to gauge their child's performance at school—instead, parents care more about what their child's teacher is saying in conferences and other parent-teacher communications.²⁴

There's an apparent paradox here: parents trust their children's teachers when it comes to evaluating their children's performance but not when it comes to grading their children's performance. Often this is because of grade inflation, which only serves to devalue grades as a metric for measuring student success. The Economist found that despite rising high-school graduation rates from 2007 to 2022, test scores have fallen: "Our analysis suggests that high schools are graduating thousands of

The Economist found that despite rising high-school graduation rates from 2007 to 2022, test scores have fallen: "Our analysis suggests that high schools are graduating thousands of students who, not long ago, might not have made the grade."

students who, not long ago, might not have made the grade."²⁵

While grade inflation has many causes, much of its rise is a policy choice. In far too many districts, teachers have little leeway in giving out grades, thanks to so-called "equitable" policies that essentially mandate grade inflation.

BACKGROUND

Bad Incentives

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was, as its name suggests, intended to ensure that American schools were enabling the educational success of all students. The bipartisan legislation mandated that states set targets for graduation rates, with penalties (up to and including school closure) imposed on schools that didn't meet them. NCLB “worked,” insofar as it did increase graduation rates—but that doesn't mean that educational quality increased with them. Because NCLB promoted higher graduation rates, schools were incentivized to graduate more students—even poorly performing students—at any cost.

In a 2024 analysis, researchers at The Economist found that NCLB caused a “trend toward weakening standards”:

[F]our-year graduation rates in our sample increased during this period [2007 to 2022], even as test scores fell. Gains were greatest in high schools with the lowest test scores. In 2007 schools with [SAT and ACT scores] ... in the bottom tenth of our sample graduated half of their pupils; in 2022 they graduated two-thirds. As low-performing schools have passed

more pupils, the relationship between test scores and graduation rates has weakened.

... Some states have lowered the bar more than others. In Illinois, graduation rates are about one percentage point higher than we would expect based on academic performance alone; in North Carolina, they are nearly eight points higher. Overall, we found that public high schools in our sample are inflating graduation rates by roughly four percentage points compared with 15 years earlier.²⁶

Eventually, just as a bipartisan coalition had voted to support NCLB in 2002, a bipartisan coalition in 2015 took it down, replacing NCLB with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which eliminated many of these perverse incentives.

However, the general push toward grade inflation has remained. As Morgan Polikoff, a professor of education at the University of Southern California, told The Economist in 2024, “The push for educational equity, and in particular racial equity, has been used in a lot of places to push against higher standards for high-school graduation.”²⁷ A Massachusetts

education advocate promoted a ballot question in 2024—which was eventually passed with nearly 60% support²⁸—that repealed the state’s high school graduation standardized testing requirement, on the basis that “[t]his single high-stakes test has become a gatekeeper, one that too often locks out our most vulnerable students, those who are black and brown, and low-income students, those who are grappling with language barriers, and those who are dealing with disabilities.”²⁹

“The push for educational equity, and in particular racial equity, has been used in a lot of places to push against higher standards for high-school graduation.”

Indeed, NCLB may have kicked off the country’s course toward decreasing standards, but today, after NCLB has been repealed, most arguments for lenient standards have less to do with perverse incentives and more to do with dubious appeals to equity.

Equitable Grading

Today, many school districts have essentially forced teachers to lower their

classroom standards in the name of non-traditional “equitable grading.” The theory was popularized by education consultant Joe Feldman, whose program, “Grading for Equity,” has been used in schools across the nation.

In a 2020 article, “Empowering Students by Demystifying Grading,” Feldman, along with Tanji Reed Marshall, wrote the following:

In traditional classrooms, power is highly concentrated in the teacher. He or she decides what is taught, how it is taught (and usually how students must learn)—and, state-mandated assessment aside, how students will be assessed. A teacher’s decisions become the lived experiences of her students’ education.

Grading—the criteria by which student performance is evaluated—represents a teacher’s most formalized, public, and enduring demonstration of her instructional power.³⁰

Equitable grading assumes that traditional grading is so fraught with bias as to be essentially meaningless. Feldman’s proposed equitable system, however, is in fact even less transparent than he makes traditional grading out to be. In a 2024 report

on Feldman's consultancy, Vince Bielski for RealClearInvestigations summarizes what equitable grading looks like in practice:

Feldman asserts that schools have a “moral obligation” to close the achievement gap [between high-income and low-income students], and his fix is far-reaching: no points for daily homework and classroom behavior, eliminating the distinction in the gradebook between students who lead discussions and those who disrupt them, and no penalties for the late submission of assignments, which shouldn't be given much weight in grading.³¹

In other words, equitable grading means that teachers can't reward or penalize students based on their behavior or academic performance. Seeing that behavior and academic performance are the two primary indicators of classroom success, equitable grading renders grades meaningless altogether. Furthermore, students who are accustomed to such leniency are ill-prepared for the workplace, where late work and lack of mastery come with real consequences (especially in fields like medicine, in which one mistake can literally be the difference between life and death). When the Arlington Public Schools district in Virginia hired Feldman³² and

implemented equitable grading—eliminating penalties for late work and introducing unlimited redos on

Equitable grading means that teachers can't reward or penalize students based on their behavior or academic performance.

assignments and exams—teachers at the majority-minority Wakefield High School noted the problems with this approach in an open letter, stating that “If deadlines are removed ... the potential certainly exists for a nightmare evaluating scenario for teachers, as submissions are delayed to suit students' needs (and whims).”³³ They also pointed out that “content and concepts lead to new content and concepts ... If students are able to manufacture their own sequence of submissions, it seems logical that doing so would hamper ‘mastery’ moving forward.” Eventually, the district went back on this policy, limiting redos on assignments and exams and allowing teachers once again to penalize students for late work.³⁴

Minimum Grading Policies

Minimum grading policies, often referred to as “no-zero” policies,

are a popular equitable grading approach. They restrict the range of grades that teachers are allowed to give their students and effectively bar teachers from giving zeroes. For instance, Kansas City Public Schools in Missouri has barred teachers from giving any grade less than a 40%, even if a student has not turned in an assignment.³⁵ In effect, minimum grading forces grade inflation by artificially boosting the averages of all students, especially those at the bottom end of the grading distribution.



Proponents of minimum grading policies claim that zeroes are needlessly punitive since even just one or two zeroes over the course of a term can prevent students from passing.³⁶ If students are not assigned

zeroes, the logic of minimum grading goes, then students will be more motivated to pass even if a few assignments go wrong. Alameda Unified School District (AUSD) in California, which does not allow teachers to give any grade less than a 50%, explains on its website:

The rationale for this [minimum grading policy] is that in a 0-100 scale, an “F” can be anything from a 0-59, whereas all the other grades (D to A) span only ten points. This makes recovering from an F extremely difficult for a student because it lowers the student’s average significantly, even if they get high grades on other assignments. For instance, a student who gets a 22 on their first assignment, an 81 on their second, and a 96 on their third will end up with 66 (D), even if they have mastered the material. Minimum Grading turns the 22 into a 50. It’s still an F, but unlike the 22, it doesn’t create an artificial barrier to achieving a better final grade. The resulting [sic] grade is now a 76% (C).³⁷

But the problem with such a policy is actually illustrated, not countered, by AUSD’s example: the grading floor of a 50% reflects a grade (the 76%) that the student did not earn, reflecting

a level of mastery that the student did not demonstrate. Moreover, the policy is unfair to the student who earned that same 76% without help from a grading floor, especially since colleges, scholarships, and employers consider grades when deciding between applicants.

Minimum grading policies are also unfair to teachers, whose authority is undermined in the classroom when they are not allowed to give grades that students deserve. An unnamed Las Vegas teacher told the Washington Post, “Kids are working the system and there is nothing we can do about it.”³⁸ An unnamed North Carolina teacher likewise told the New York Times, “[W]e get students who skip over 100 days, have a 50%, complete a couple of assignments to tip over into 59.5% and then pass.”³⁹

Where’s the Data?

In a 2023 article for the New York Times, “Teachers Can’t Hold Students Accountable. It’s Making the Job Miserable,” columnist Jessica Gross noted that she tried to find data on minimum grading policies, but was unable to.⁴⁰ “It’s hard to find national data about how widespread this kind of 50% rule is (and the experts I spoke with said they didn’t know of anyone who was systematically collecting this information),” she wrote. “But

policies like this have been adopted by districts from Washington, D.C., to Boise, Idaho.”

In other words, the districts that implement these policies are essentially making them up as they go along, often relying on feel-good words like “equity” instead of grounding their policy choices in hard facts or evidence. As it stands, there is no empirical evidence suggesting that there are benefits to deviating from traditional grading practices—if anything, empirical evidence suggests the opposite.

Researchers at Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform found that a new, more lenient grading scale at high schools in North Carolina led to higher GPAs without increased student achievement and allowed students to skip school more frequently, leading to more students chronically absent.⁴¹ Other researchers at Annenberg have likewise found that when teachers have higher grading standards, students are less likely to be absent and more likely to achieve more academically.⁴²

The Way Forward

When school districts baselessly nix traditional grading and replace it with unproven theories of equity, they turn classrooms into experiments. It's no wonder that various school districts—from Rochester, Minnesota⁴³ to Anne Arundel County, Maryland⁴⁴—have been forced to backtrack on equitable grading: equitable grading fails students by barring their teachers from holding them to high standards. As equitable grading policies are implemented on a local level, they must be addressed on a state and local level.

End Equitable Grading

School districts that have implemented equitable grading policies should return to traditional grading standards that allow for higher expectations and more student growth. Rather than the artificial equity of minimum grading floors, school districts should implement policies that equalize students by holding them to the same, transparent standard across classrooms.

Promote Transparency Through Standardized Testing

Because standardized tests are not subject to the same variables as grades, they are excellent trackers of student performance. In 2020 and 2021, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), like many other universities at the time, suspended its SAT/ACT testing requirement for high school seniors applying for admission. In 2022, however, MIT reinstated its requirement—as did Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Cornell, and various others. When discussing MIT's decision, its dean of admissions said, "Our research has shown that, in most cases, we cannot reliably predict students will do well at MIT unless we consider standardized test results alongside grades, coursework, and other factors."⁴⁵

Districts and states should implement some level of standardized testing to accurately measure student performance. This will contextualize graduation rates and GPAs and ensure student achievement is tracked, measured, and improved upon as needed.

Crack Down on Absenteeism

Students who are not in the classroom are the ones who struggle most with late work and mastery of content. Instead of lowering the bar for such students under the guise of equity, school districts can work to address their absenteeism, which has been endemic in schools across the country, especially since the COVID pandemic.⁴⁶ Indeed, a study by The Associated Press, Stanford University's Big Local News project, and Stanford professor of education Thomas Dee found that 230,000 students in 21 states had gone "missing," having never returned to school and being completely unaccounted for after pandemic-era school closures.⁴⁷

Enforcing and implementing truancy laws at the state and local level can help ensure students attend school and do the work they need to do in order to pass without any additional equity-based measures artificially inflating their achievement. Additionally, implementing district policies that fail students after a certain number of absences per term can disincentivize absenteeism while also ensuring that grades retain their meaning.

IV. Stop Social-Emotional Learning

THE PROBLEM

Teachers are not therapists. It seems like a trivial statement, but in school districts around the country, teachers are made to dedicate hours of training time and classroom time to social-emotional learning (SEL), a therapeutic approach to education that emphasizes feelings and progressive ideology over learning.

Mandatory SEL programs in many states and districts force students to partake in a form of group therapy, creating a troubling ethical situation that is also a recipe for teacher burnout. When the line between teacher and therapist is blurred, teachers are forced to take on the additional responsibility for the psychological well-being of the students assigned to them—which can mean hundreds of children a year per teacher in some districts. As the American Enterprise Institute’s

Robert Pondiscio writes regarding the explosion of SEL, “Regardless of good intent, teachers are not mental health professionals, counselors, or clergy. They should not be asked—nor is there any reason to expect them—to perform competently in those roles.”⁴⁸

BACKGROUND

What Is SEL and Why Is It Bad for Education?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which formally established SEL in the 1990s, defines SEL as follows:

We define social and emotional learning (SEL) as an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage

emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.⁴⁹

If that sounds like therapy, that's because it effectively is—in all but name. Indeed, SEL originated in the 1960s with Dr. James Comer, a child psychiatrist at the Yale School of Medicine, who believed that “the contrast between a child's experiences at home and those in school deeply

affects the child's psychosocial development and that this in turn shapes academic achievement.”⁵⁰ In other words, the original intent of SEL was always for schools to “correct” any social and emotional problems students may have at home, presuming parents guilty of neglect until proven innocent.

SEL is also a highly ideological form of therapy, one that leverages the activist language of “equity” to justify its existence. The CASEL definition continues:



SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.

Naturally, SEL cuts into time that could be spent on traditional subjects like reading, writing, and arithmetic. But its widespread adoption in recent years is alarming for non-curricular reasons, too. Namely, when school districts implement SEL, teachers are made to act outside the boundaries of their profession and students become unwilling psychological subjects to be indoctrinated with certain values—often without parental consent, as SEL is usually not its own subject but rather incorporated into all other aspects of the classroom, including traditional subjects.

For instance, CASEL recommends SEL principles be used in elementary math classrooms, suggesting that teachers “[l]ead a class activity that

asks students to identify feelings they might have in situations involving mathematics using vocabulary (e.g., lead discussions using questions such as, ‘How would you feel if you solved an easy problem?,’ ‘Would you feel different or the same if you solved a harder problem?,’ ‘How would you feel if a friend was having a hard time in class?’).”⁵¹ Because there is no opting out of math class, there is, in this example, no opting out of SEL either.

In other words, SEL, where it is implemented, is essentially mandatory group therapy: students are made to reflect on their own feelings, often to their own detriment, as journalist Abigail Shrier documents in her book, “Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren’t Growing Up.” A telling anecdote from her book:

Ever since her school adopted social-emotional learning in 2021, Ms. Julie routinely began the day by directing her Salt Lake City fifth graders to sit in one of the plastic chairs she’d arranged in a circle. “How is each of you feeling this morning?” she would ask, performing a more intensive version of the “emotions check-in.” One day, she cut to the chase: “What is something that is making you really sad right now?”⁵²

Students, writes Shrier, wound up spilling about the worst part of their lives and bursting into tears at the question in what she describes as an “AA meeting-style breakdown. Except this AA meeting featured elementary school kids who then ran to tell their friends what everyone else had shared.” She continues:

Advocates of social-emotional learning claim that nearly all kids today have suffered serious traumatic experiences that leave them unable to learn. They also insist that having an educator host a class-wide trauma swap before lunch will help such kids heal. Neither claim is well-founded.

But the predictable result is precisely what Ms. Julie saw: otherwise happy kids are brought low, and a child seriously struggling has his private pain publicly exposed by someone in no position to remedy it.

SEL, then, is worse than useless—often, it actively worsens the social and emotional well-being of children despite all the state laws mandating it be implemented in public schools.

Where is SEL Mandatory?

As of a 2019 analysis by ChildTrends.org,⁵³ SEL is required in 19 states and encouraged in 16 others, and, as of 2023, all 50 states have SEL competencies included in their curriculum for at least pre-K.⁵⁴

***SEL is worse than useless—
often, it actively worsens
the social and emotional
well-being of children.***

Moreover, SEL is often incentivized through grants. The 2024 spending bill from Congress set aside \$87 million in grants for innovations in SEL, \$90 million for the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program (which emphasizes SEL), and \$174 million for Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grants and School-Based Mental Health Services Grants. Various states also have their own SEL grants.⁵⁵ Many other educational grants that on the surface have nothing to do with SEL also have SEL requirements rolled into them.

The Way Forward

Expecting teachers both to teach and to perform unlicensed group therapy by way of SEL gets in the way of both the learning and the emotional well-being of the children assigned to them. It also overextends teachers far beyond their job description by saddling them with what are often extremely non-transparent expectations for their teaching. Ending the fad of SEL will go a long way not only toward improving our schools but toward re-establishing healthy expectations for teachers.

End Taxpayer-Funded Grants for SEL

By cutting all SEL-promoting grants, Congress can disincentivize schools from investing further in SEL. But, seeing that federal funding is only about 10% of the entire education budget, state and local governments will also have to eliminate SEL grants.

States Should Survey Public Schools

One of the biggest problems with SEL is that it is opaque and is implemented by public schools not only out of parents' sight but often out of the government's sight too. In the interest of transparency, states should follow in the footsteps of Florida and send surveys to public schools to gain knowledge of whether or not schools are using SEL curricula.⁵⁶

States Should Reject SEL-Forward Curriculum

Since so much public school curriculum is decided from state to state, legislators can prioritize ensuring only curricula free of SEL are used in public school classrooms.

Textbooks

In 2023, Florida's Commissioner of Education sent a memo to Florida public and charter schools after being informed about concerning SEL content in textbooks by the Miami-Dade school board: "Edgenuity/Imagine Learning's divisive and

discriminatory content branded as ‘social-emotional learning (SEL)’ has no place in Florida’s classrooms.”⁵⁷ Clear instructions about textbooks from the state can go a long way in ensuring that schools do not use curricula that go against principles of transparency and parental rights.

Teacher Training

By barring SEL curricula from being used for teacher licensure and teacher training programs, states can help ensure that the next generation of teachers is better equipped to teach without being forced to redirect their limited time and training toward the unhelpful and problematic concepts found in SEL.

Parental Notice and Opt-Out

At a minimum, parents deserve written notice if SEL is being used in schools. By mandating that schools notify parents when students are taught an SEL curriculum, states can increase transparency in schools and allow parents who want to see changes to the curriculum to advocate for it.

Furthermore, insofar as SEL consists of stand-alone classes or activities, states should allow parents to opt out of SEL classes and activities, as many states do with sex education.

V. Teacher Licensure Reform

THE PROBLEM

While private schools and many charter schools don't require teachers to have licensure, public schools across the country do. Teacher licensure is not inherently problematic—indeed, it often serves as a form of quality assurance, especially for secondary school teachers—but parts of it are purposefully obscure, bureaucratic, and laden with red tape, serving neither teachers nor students. Instead, licensure often solely serves the credentialing organizations which, by controlling the supply of teachers, effectively have a monopoly over American public education.

Indeed, many aspects of the current web of licensing requirements have less to do with qualifying teachers in their subjects or classroom management and more to do with ideological gatekeeping and ever-

evolving progressive pedagogy techniques.

Especially at a time when parents around the country are concerned about ideology in schools, it is important to note that part of the reason those ideas proliferate is because of a centralized system in which a small number of academics in schools of education can influence the next generation of public school teachers throughout the country. When states mandate that teachers pursue education degrees and/or certification programs in order to pursue licensure, would-be teachers are indoctrinated with bad ideas, both political (such as gender ideology or critical race theory) and pedagogical.

In what is now a famous example of the latter, schools of education, beginning with the Teachers College at Columbia University, pushed the idea of “balanced literacy” as

opposed to traditional phonics for reading instruction.⁵⁸ The balanced literacy approach, while trendy, wound up leaving many children functionally illiterate. In this case, the requirements for teacher licensure not only ensured that students did not learn to read properly but ensured that teachers did not learn to teach reading properly.

With such a system in place, many would-be public school teachers find themselves unable to navigate the complex process of teacher licensure, and many competent, talented people are shut out of teaching altogether or are taught and then made to teach bad methods and ideas. To solve public school teacher retention, the system of teacher licensure needs to change fundamentally.

BACKGROUND

Teacher Licensure: A History

Per David L. Angus at the Fordham Institute, teacher licensure has existed in some form or another since colonial times, when the approval of local ministers was necessary for anyone seeking a teaching position.⁵⁹ By the nineteenth century, though, the move toward centralization had begun in cities, where local

governments began to take on the work of approving teachers that was once limited to ministers—initially by linking licensure to subject-matter exams and eventually to pedagogical exams. The twentieth century saw further centralization, especially in the era following the Second World War, when university-based education requirements for teachers supplanted certification exams. What this historical background goes to show is that many of our current licensure requirements are the result of both ideological and professional centralization, both of which have made our school systems worse.

Is More Credentialing Linked to Achievement? Evidence Suggests Otherwise

Policymakers have often resorted to the idea that more credentialing requirements improve the quality of teachers, but there is little evidence to support such a conclusion. This became quite clear during the COVID pandemic, when various states experienced teacher shortages and were unable to run licensing exams, forcing them to allow emergency licensure. In Massachusetts⁶⁰ and New Jersey,⁶¹ states with some of the highest-performing schools in the country, teachers certified under the emergency programs of the pandemic era were just as



effective as their traditionally licensed counterparts.

It's important to note that there are different forms of licensure, some of which are more useful than others.

Subject-Matter Examinations

The American Institutes for Research found that the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) predicted teacher performance—teachers with higher MTEL scores also produced higher-performing students (as measured by student test scores) and had better evaluations.⁶² Similar results have been found in other states as well. For instance, economists found a positive link between teacher licensure scores and student performance in math and biology in Washington.⁶³ In North Carolina, likewise, more effective math teachers were found to have higher scores on the PRAXIS II licensure exam.⁶⁴

Master's Degrees

On the other hand, master's degrees have less predictive power when it comes to teacher quality. Economists at Duke and the University of Washington found that “Teachers [in North Carolina] who entered teaching with a master's degree, or who earned it within five years of

beginning to teach, were as effective as teachers without a master's degree. Teachers who earned a master's degree more than five years after they started teaching were less effective than those without master's degrees.”⁶⁵ Nevertheless, New York, Maryland, and Connecticut require teachers to have master's degrees, and many states give teachers pay boosts for earning a master's degree (which are not available to otherwise competent, high-performing teachers with bachelor's degrees).



Degrees in Education

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin and Florida State University found “no evidence that education majors are significantly

more productive as teachers than non-education majors.”⁶⁶ They additionally found that *informal*, on-the-job training was more important for increasing teacher productivity among elementary and middle school teachers—they did not, however, find a strong link between formal professional development training and teacher productivity, which is unsurprising given how ideological in nature colleges of education have become.

Continuing Education

Teachers often have to prove hours of “continuing education” professional development training every year to maintain their licensure. In other words, in many districts, teacher education does not end after they receive a degree or are certified. Most continuing education suffers from the same problems that other teacher education suffers from: it creates an additional bureaucratic burden on experienced teachers, tying professional advancement to courses that accomplish little. States should avoid blanket mandates for continuing education programs for experienced teachers, and should instead focus on subject-specific professional development insofar as it is necessary (e.g., phonics training for teachers, as mandated by Indiana).⁶⁷

Student Teaching Practicums

Student teaching—often a teacher’s first foray into the classroom—is, ideally, a time when a student teacher is guided by a more experienced teacher and learns how to operate his or her own future classroom. In practice, however, student teaching does not seem to do much, and there is little evidence that it should be a requirement for licensure. After conducting a study of 134 student teaching programs in 2011, the National Council on Teacher Quality concluded, “Three out of four institutions we reviewed fail to require cooperating teachers to be effective instructors. Nearly two out of three fail to assess the mentoring capacity of a teacher (or at least to require any mentoring training).”⁶⁸ The former president of the council, Kate Walsh, told the New York Times regarding the study, “Many people would say student teaching is the most important piece of teacher preparation ... But the field is really barren in the area of standards. The basic accrediting body doesn’t even have a standard for how long a student teacher needs to be in the classroom. And most of the institutions we reviewed do not do enough to screen the quality of the cooperating teacher the student will work with.”⁶⁹

The Way Forward

Cutting red tape and decentralizing education not only allows for more teachers, but it allows for better teachers.

Focus on Subject-Matter Exams

Subject-matter exams have more predictive power for student learning than essentially any other form of teacher licensure. States should focus on high-quality teacher licensure exams, especially in math and science, in order to ensure quality instruction, as opposed to relying on education degrees or credentials like master's degrees.

Expand the Teaching Force by Relaxing Degree Requirements

More states should seek to emulate Louisiana, which allows people who hold associate's degrees in a given subject to teach in that subject, so long as they are above the age of 25, are continuously enrolled in a bachelor's program for teacher education, and become bachelor's certified within five years.⁷⁰ Pursuing a policy along these lines doesn't just help staffing shortages; it allows teachers to work as they study and get more from their bachelor's programs.

Open the Profession to Second-Career Teachers

Second-career teachers are often older and wiser, and bring with them experience from other fields (e.g., business, the military, etc.), which benefits students. But career switching can be difficult because of bureaucratic licensure requirements. States can pursue policies like Virginia's, which has a career switcher program for those with at least three years of full-time work experience who earn qualifying scores on the state licensure exams and who complete a more flexible teacher training program.⁷¹ A handful of states—including Texas,⁷² Florida,⁷³ Missouri,⁷⁴ Indiana,⁷⁵ and Michigan⁷⁶—have alternative certification programs with varying degrees of relaxed requirements for teachers.

Establish Licensure Reciprocity

As of June 2020, only eight states offer full teacher license reciprocity, i.e., only eight states honor the licenses of teachers licensed to teach in other states with few or no additional licensure requirements.⁷⁷ By choosing to expand licensure reciprocity, states can minimize the burdens for good, vetted teachers to stay in the teaching profession if they move—giving states access to a talented supply of teachers they would otherwise be shutting out.

Excise Ideology From Teacher Licensure

In 2024, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law⁷⁸ House Bill 1291, Educator Preparation Programs, on the premise that teacher preparation programs may not “distort significant historical events or include a curriculum or instruction that teaches identity politics ... or is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities.”⁷⁹ Additionally, under this law, teacher preparation programs must “afford candidates the opportunity to think critically, achieve mastery of academic program content, learn instructional strategies, and demonstrate competence.”

States have the authority to certify which schools of education are allowed to license teachers; they should also use this authority to regulate schools of education from spreading and further entrenching pernicious and partisan ideologies in the teaching workforce.



VI. Reforming Education for Children with Disabilities

THE PROBLEM

Children with special needs deserve special education. Nearly everyone agrees on this, which is why we have federal laws that protect the right to education for children with special needs.

Nevertheless, the definition of “disabled” has expanded dramatically to include students with relatively minor problems that don’t impair their learning in general education classes, compared to those with larger problems that do.

Because of this, over the 2010s in particular, the number of children with disabilities has expanded in size: A record 7.5 million students, or 15.2% of the public school population, accessed special

education programs in 2022-2023, up from less than 13% ten years prior.⁸⁰

The percentage of students receiving a Section 504 plan—a federal policy that guarantees accommodations including extra time on tests—has more than tripled from 1% in the 2009-2010 academic year to 3.3% in the 2020-2021 academic year.

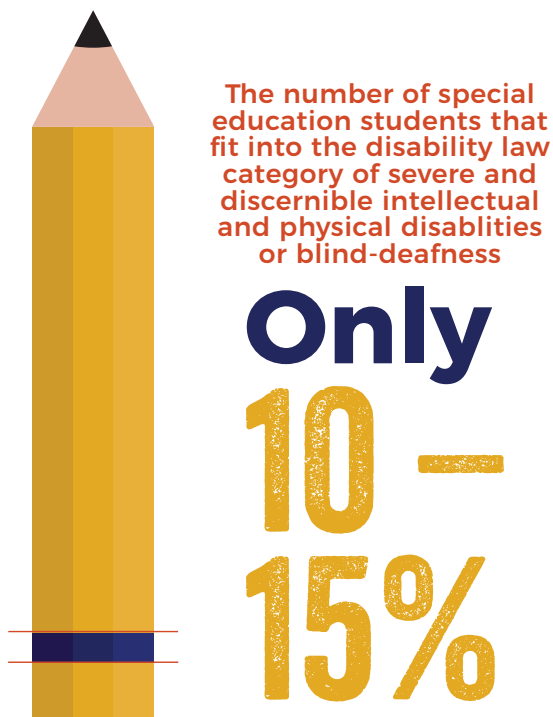
BACKGROUND

History

The 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA or EHA) ensured that disabled children had the right to a free appropriate public education.⁸¹ In 1990, the EHA was reauthorized by Congress and renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which stands today.

Overbroad Definition of “Disability”

While disability law was originally intended for children with severe and discernible intellectual and physical disabilities or blind-deafness, today only 10-15% of students in special education fit in that category.⁸²



In theory, IDEA requires that schools evaluate students without severe cognitive disabilities before placing them in special education to ensure “that underachievement in a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math.”⁸³ In practice, however, these children are often grouped into special education anyway. As special education advocate Kalman R. Hettelman, author of “Misabeled As

Disabled,” has written, most students in special education today “are found eligible mostly under the IDEA classifications of specific learning disability (including dyslexia), speech or language impairment and other health impairment (mainly attention deficit disorders). These are genuine learning difficulties, but they can be addressed in general education. For example, best instructional practices for students diagnosed with dyslexia are substantially the same as those for all struggling readers.”⁸⁴

In other words, special education is being used to ameliorate the failures of general education, with students who are lagging behind being grouped in with students with severe cognitive disabilities (e.g., Down’s syndrome), which makes little sense. It also means that special education programs are both overextended, with their resources being used toward more children than they should be teaching, and underutilized, in that special education resources are inefficient and diluted for the severely disabled children who actually need such instruction.

504 Plan Misuse

In 2019, the college cheating scandal now known as Operation Varsity Blues revealed the misuse of 504 plans by

celebrity parents who sought to get their children a leg up with extra time on standardized exams and in-class assignments.

A 504 plan, under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, ensures access to reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities who do not need special education. Whereas an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a legally binding document that identifies thirteen disability categories and entitles students to special education, 504 plans are far more vague.⁸⁵ To be eligible for a 504 plan, a student only needs “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,” per the Department of Education.⁸⁶ By being broad, the current 504 plan policy leaves open loopholes for students and parents, which, when exploited, often make teaching an impossible and bureaucracy-laden task for teachers.

Creating Helpless Students

While 504 accommodations were initially intended for students with obviously severe conditions (e.g., students with cancer)⁸⁷ for whom accommodations like extra time to turn in exams are both reasonable and necessary, 504 accommodations are increasingly used for students

While 504 accommodations were initially intended for students with obviously severe conditions ... 504 accommodations are increasingly used for students with nondescript mental health issues.

with nondescript mental health issues. Worse yet, accommodations have become very unreasonable thanks to school counselors and other school psychological professionals who, as Abigail Shrier writes in “Bad Therapy,” “lobby teachers to excuse lateness or absence, forgive missed classwork, allow a student to take walks around the school in the middle of class, ratchet grades upward, reduce or eliminate homework requirements, offer oral exams in place of written ones, and provide preferential seating to students who lack even an official diagnosis.”⁸⁸

Due to this accommodation creep, students with relatively minor mental health concerns (e.g., mild anxiety) feel like they must rely on accommodations that they don’t

actually need, rather than helping those students work through their concerns to the point where they have the confidence to complete their tasks without accommodations. Shrier also writes of a mother who regretted allowing a school counselor to give her son accommodations (in the form of untimed tests) for anxiety. “I really regret it because he used it as a crutch. Like, ‘Oh, I can’t turn the paper in on time

Far from making the education system more equitable, as is the a behind 504 plans, current loopholes in disability law exacerbate wealth gaps.

because I have a 504 ...’ We thought we were helping, and I realized [these accommodations] are not helpful.” The misuse of 504 plans leaves children less resilient and less capable of overcoming their difficulties.

Gaming the System

Especially in wealthy districts, students often have 504 plans that are designed to help them get a leg

up. Far from making the education system more equitable, as is the intention behind 504 plans, current loopholes in disability law exacerbate wealth gaps. The National Education Policy Center noted in a report:

In 2019, The Wall Street Journal conducted a broader analysis of federal data, examining data from 9,000 public schools and finding that affluent school districts have seen a significant increase in 504 plans within the last decade. They found striking differences between wealthy and under-resourced school districts. Whereas an average of 4.2% of students had 504 plans in districts where no more than 10% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, only 1.6% of students attending districts where 75% or more of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch had such plans. The New York Times found a similar wealth gap in their K-12 analysis. The advantage in securing a 504 plan is extended into college admissions testing, because the SAT and ACT organizations rely heavily on the schools’ reporting and documentation.⁸⁹

In the classroom, this abuse of 504 plans can mean that a teacher has to give half the class extra time, while the other half of the class has

to perform tasks on time. Not only does this make learning conditions unfair for students; it forces teachers essentially to personalize a curriculum intended for a classroom of students, which, past a certain number of students with genuine disabilities, is unsustainable and demoralizing for teachers. A teacher from an “affluent public magnet program” told the website, *We Are Teachers*, in 2024:

I work at a school with a unique population. We have quite a few students with medically necessary accommodations, but we also have students who arrive at school suddenly with a medical diagnosis requiring extra time despite no

feedback from teachers suggesting a need for it. I recognize it’s completely possible for a student to have a legitimate diagnosis and a need for accommodations that may have flown under all their teachers’ radars. However, we are also well aware of fliers in the district circulating among parents of doctors in the area who are known to hand out ADHD diagnoses. In some cases, I think what’s happening is a pay-to-play situation.⁹⁰

Indeed, 504 accommodations have drifted far away from their original intent to ensure educational access for children with real, verifiable medical conditions.



The Way Forward

Enforce IDEA's Original Intent

As Margaret J. McLaughlin, a professor of special education at the University of Maryland, has written, federal lawmakers need to “alter the current construct of ‘disability’ under the IDEA and take special education back to its roots as an educational law that pertains only to students with clear and evident disabilities.... This could focus the resources on those students most in need of specialized long-term education and related services as opposed to having special education programs provide compensatory services for students whose only ‘disability’ has been poor or insufficient general education.”⁹¹

Federal policymakers should reevaluate how they define disability under IDEA and clarify the law to ensure that special education is reserved for students who have severe and discernible disabilities that require specialized instruction.

Crack Down on 504 Plan Misuse

Much of the reason 504 plans are misused is because school counselors and administrators conflate unrealistic accommodations with reasonable and realistic accommodations. It is not reasonable to expect teachers to allow students with mild anxiety to leave a classroom at any given moment, even if it is eminently reasonable to expect teachers to allow students with epilepsy to leave a classroom at any given moment. While most people recognize this, it is taboo in education to criticize the misuse of 504 plans, because schools do not want to discriminate against genuinely disabled students. Schools need guidance and protection from lawsuits to be able to deny excessive accommodations to students with conditions too mild to warrant them.

Federal policymakers should clearly define reasonable accommodations to prevent accommodation creep and ensure that students are not given a free pass just because they have a 504 plan.



Expand School Choice

A study by Jay P. Greene and Marcus Winters “found that the test scores of disabled students remaining in Florida public schools improved as more nearby private schools began participating in the [Florida special education voucher] program. That is, as disabled students began to get more options to leave their public schools, those schools became more attentive to their needs and produced better results.”⁹²

That said, special education-specific vouchers may suffer the same issues of misuse and overuse that 504 plans currently do. Instead of making vouchers specific to special education, expanding school choice more broadly can be an equitable solution for all students—those with disabilities and those without. Students with disabilities can go to schools that are more effective for them, where teachers who desire to teach special education can fully concentrate on those students. Likewise, teachers whose primary qualification is general education are better able to dedicate their teaching to general education students, and students who desire general education environments can reap their benefits. With expanded school choice measures, teachers and students alike win.



VII. Conclusion

Rapidly declining test scores, childhood innumeracy and illiteracy, and low rates of teacher retention are frequently discussed in relation to education policy. But often not acknowledged is the sheer amount of red tape teachers are forced to navigate that makes teaching both more difficult than it needs to be and less rewarding than it should be.

Teachers should be allowed to maintain basic classroom discipline without the state deciding what is and isn't acceptable. They should be allowed to maintain the integrity of the grades they give out, too. They should not have to become quasi-therapists to their students (in addition to the work they are already tasked with), nor should they be forced to differentiate instruction for increasing numbers of students

in their class due to an overbroad definition of disability. They certainly should not have to jump through hoops to receive and maintain licensure, seeing that most of their professional development and training can only really occur on the job.

That teachers are subject to regulation after regulation shows us the extent to which they are, all too often, victims, rather than perpetrators, of a bureaucratic system that ultimately bars them from spending time on what they signed up to do: helping students learn. Freeing teachers up to do just that—to teach—is in everyone's best interest: a teaching profession that is highly valued attracts more and more people of high value and only benefits American students and our education system as a whole.



Endnotes

- 1 Dr. Keri D. Ingraham. “New National Test Scores Make Undeniable Case For School Choice.” *Independent Women’s Forum*, Jan. 31, 2025. <https://www.iwf.org/2025/01/31/new-national-test-scores-make-undeniable-case-for-school-choice/>.
- 2 Matt Barnum. “Teacher turnover hits new highs across the U.S.” *Chalkbeat*, Mar. 6, 2023. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/3/6/23624340/teacher-turnover-leaving-the-profession-quitting-higher-rate/>.
- 3 John Adams. “Expressions on Education.” *United States Bureau of Education*, Bulletin 1913, No. 28, Whole Number 5381913. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED543227.pdf>.
- 4 Congressman Aaron Bean. “Chair Bean Holds Hearing on Improving Teacher Preparation.” *Youtube*, Sept. 25, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOBKermmxO8&feature=youtu.be>.
- 5 “Chair Bean Holds Hearing on Improving Teacher Preparation.” *Bean.house.gov*, Sept. 25, 2024. <https://bean.house.gov/media/press-releases/chair-bean-holds-hearing-improving-teacher-preparation>.
- 6 Dana Goldstein. “American Children’s Reading Skills Reach New Lows.” *The New York Times*, Jan. 29, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/29/us/reading-skills-naep.html>.
- 7 Alex Harwin. “Teachers Say the Public Views Them Negatively.” *Education Week*, Oct. 10, 2024. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teachers-say-the-public-views-them-negatively/2024/10>.
- 8 Alyson Klein. “Survey: Educators’ Political Leanings, Who They Voted For, Where They Stand on Key Issues.” *Education Week*, Dec. 12, 2017. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/survey-educators-political-leanings-who-they-voted-for-where-they-stand-on-key-issues/2017/12>.
- 9 Madeline Will, Elizabeth Heubeck, Ilean Najarro, Arianna Prothero, and Sarah Schwartz. “It’s ‘a Passion, It’s Not Just a Paycheck’: Teachers’ Advice on Joining the Profession.” *Education Week*, Mar. 27, 2024. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/its-a-passion-its-not-just-a-paycheck-teachers-advice-on-joining-the-profession/2024/03>.
- 10 Arianna Prothero. “Student Behavior Isn’t Getting Any Better, Survey Shows.” *Education Week*, Apr. 20, 2023. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/student-behavior-isnt-getting-any-better-survey-shows/2023/04>.
- 11 Luona Lin, Kim Parker, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz. “3. Problems students are facing at public K-12 schools.” *Pew Research Center*, Apr. 4, 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/04/04/problems-students-are-facing-at-public-k-12-schools/>.
- 12 David Griffith and Adam Tyner. “Discipline Reform Through The Eyes of Teachers.” *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, Jul. 30, 2019. <http://teachersondiscipline.com/#chronically-disruptive-students>.

- 13 “2024 MSTA Member Survey.” *Missouri State Teachers Association*, 2024. <https://msta.org/stories/2024-member-survey>.
- 14 “Notice of Language Assistance Dear Colleague Letter on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline.” *U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education*, 2014. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.pdf>.
- 15 Jonathan Butcher. “The U.S. Department of Education Should Rescind 2014 Federal School-Discipline Guidance.” *The Heritage Foundation*, Mar. 28, 2018. <https://www.heritage.org/education/report/the-us-department-education-should-rescind-2014-federal-school-discipline-guidance>.
- 16 Inez Stepman. “Unintended Consequences of Restorative Justice.” *Independent Women’s Forum*, Apr. 2019. <https://www.iwf.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/RestorativeJustice.pdf>.
- 17 Miguel A. Cardona and Roberto J. Rodriguez. “Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates.” *U.S. Department of Education*, Mar. 2023. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>.
- 18 “Video Games And School Shootings, Conversations With Tanzina Vega & Lauren Groff.” *WLRN*, Jun. 5, 2018. <https://www.wlrn.org/post/video-games-and-school-shootings-conversations-tanzina-vega-lauren-groff>.
- 19 Betsy DeVos, Kirstjen M. Nielsen, Alex M. Azar II, and Matthew Witaker. “Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety.” *U.S. Department of Education*, December 18, 2018. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/documents/school-safety/school-safety-reportpdf.pdf>.
- 20 “Resource on Confronting Racial Discrimination in Student Discipline.” *U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice*, May 2023. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tvi-student-discipline-resource-202305.pdf>.
- 21 Bryan Kelley, Carlos Jamieson, and Zeke Perez Jr. “50-State Comparison: School Discipline Policies.” *Education Commission of the States*, May 17, 2021. <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-school-discipline-policies/>.
- 22 Bryan Kelley, Carlos Jamieson, and Zeke Perez Jr. “School Discipline Policies: What limitations are placed on the use of suspension and/or expulsion?” *Education Commission of the States*, May 2021. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/school-discipline-policies-03>.
- 23 Max Eden. “Investigation: In NYC Where a Teenager Was Killed, Students & Educators Say Lax Discipline Led to Bullying, Chaos, and Death.” *The 74*, Jun. 11, 2018. <https://www.the74million.org/article/investigation-in-new-york-city-school-where-a-teenager-was-killed-students-educators-say-lax-discipline-led-to-bullying-chaos-and-death/>.
- 24 “The State of Education Opportunity in America: A 50-State Survey of 20,000 Parents.” *50CAN*, Oct. 2024. <https://50can.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/50CAN.EducationOpportunitySurvey.pdf>.
- 25 “New numbers show falling standards in American high schools.” *The Economist*, Mar. 10, 2024. <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2024/03/10/new-numbers-show-falling-standards-in-american-high-schools>.

- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 “Massachusetts Question 2 Election Results: Remove MCAS Tests as High School Graduation Requirement.” *The New York Times*, Dec. 3, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/11/05/us/elections/results-massachusetts-question-2-remove-mcas-tests-as-high-school-graduation-requirement.html>.
- 29 Michael Jonas. “MCAS ballot question: clashing views of educational equity.” *CommonWealth Beacon*, Nov. 3, 2024. <https://commonwealthbeacon.org/education/mcas-ballot-question-a-battle-over-clashing-views-of-educational-equity/>.
- 30 Joe Feldman and Tanji Reed Marshall. “Empowering Students by Demystifying Grading.” ASCD, Mar. 1, 2020. <https://ascd.org/el/articles/empowering-students-by-demystifying-grading>.
- 31 Vince Bielski. “‘Grading for Equity’: Promoting Students by Banning Grades of Zero and Leaving No Class Cut-Ups Behind.” *RealClearInvestigations*, Apr. 24, 2024. https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2024/04/24/grading_for_equity_promoting_students_with_no_zeroes_and_no_class_cut-ups_left_behind_1026319.html.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Nick Minock. “Va. teachers push back on equity proposal to abolish some grades, late homework penalties.” *ABC 7 News*, Dec. 28, 2021. <https://wjla.com/news/crisis-in-the-classrooms/va-teachers-push-back-on-equity-proposal-to-abolish-some-grades-late-homework-penalties>.
- 34 “Policy Implementation Procedure I-7.2.3.34 PIP-2: Reporting Student Progress and Grades.” *Arlington Public Schools*, Jun. 23, 2022. [https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/arlington/Board.nsf/files/CPRJVG4F0341/\\$file/I-7.2.3.34%20PIP-2%20Reporting%20Student%20Progress%20and%20Grades%20\(Secondary\)%20.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/arlington/Board.nsf/files/CPRJVG4F0341/$file/I-7.2.3.34%20PIP-2%20Reporting%20Student%20Progress%20and%20Grades%20(Secondary)%20.pdf).
- 35 Sharon Chen. “No more zeros: New grading policy in place at Kansas City Public Schools.” *KCTV 5*, Aug. 19, 2024. <https://www.kctv5.com/2024/08/19/no-more-zeros-new-grading-policy-place-kansas-city-public-schools/>.
- 36 James Carifio and Theodore Carey. “The Arguments and Data in Favor of Minimum Grading.” *Mid-Western Educational Researcher - Volume 25, Issue 4*, 2013. <https://www.mwera.org/MWER/volumes/v25/issue4/v25n4-Carifio-Carey-POINT-COUNTERPOINT-SECTION.pdf>.
- 37 “Grading for Equity.” *Alameda Unified School District*, accessed Feb. 10, 2025. <https://www.alamedaunified.org/departments/curriculum-instruction/grading-for-equity>.
- 38 Jay Matthews. “Divisive school issue, easy grading, escapes notice as some teachers quietly resist.” *The Washington Post*, Oct. 30, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/10/30/standards-based-grading-teacher-pushback/>.
- 39 Jessica Grose. “Teachers Can’t Hold Students Accountable. It’s Making the Job Miserable.” *The New York Times*, Oct. 4, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/04/opinion/teachers-grades-students-parents.html>.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 A. Brooks Bowden, Viviana Rodriguez, and Zach Weingarten. “WorkingPaper No. 23-836: The Unintended Consequences of Academic Leniency.” *Brown University Annenberg*, Sept. 2023. <https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai23-836.pdf>.

- 42 Seth Gershenson, Stephen B. Holt, and Adam Tyner. "EdWorkingPaper No. 22-644: Making the Grade: The Effect of Teacher Grading Standards on Student Outcomes." *Brown University Annenberg*, Sept. 2022. <https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai22-644.pdf>.
- 43 Carly Moran. "Rochester Public Schools abolishes pandemic-era 'equitable' grading." *The Center Square*, Jul. 11, 2024. https://www.thecentersquare.com/minnesota/article_198f9104-3fbe-11ef-81e7-27fe08662cd6.html.
- 44 Jacob Baumgart. "New Grading Policy Penalizes Late Work, Limits Redos In Anne Arundel Schools." *Patch*, Aug. 15, 2024. <https://patch.com/maryland/annearundel/new-grading-policy-penalizes-late-work-limits-redos-aacps>.
- 45 Kathy Wren. "Q&A: Stuart Schmill on MIT's decision to reinstate the SAT/ACT requirement." *MIT News*, Mar. 28, 2022. <https://news.mit.edu/2022/stuart-schmill-sat-act-requirement-0328>.
- 46 Kaylee McGhee White. "The Students Who Never Came Back." *Washington Examiner*, Jan. 25, 2024. <https://www.iwf.org/2024/01/25/the-students-who-never-came-back/>.
- 47 Bianca Vázquez Toness and Sharon Lurye. "Thousands of kids are missing from school. Where did they go?" *The Associated Press News*, Feb. 9, 2023. <https://projects.apnews.com/features/2023/missing-children/index.html>.
- 48 Robert Pondiscio. "The Unexamined Rise of Therapeutic Education: How Social-Emotional Learning Extends K-12 Education's Reach into Students' Lives and Expands Teachers' Roles." *American Enterprise Institute*, Oct. 2021. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/The-Unexamined-Rise-of-Therapeutic-Education.pdf?x85095>.
- 49 "Fundamentals of SEL." *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*, accessed Feb. 10, 2025. <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>.
- 50 "Social and Emotional Learning: A Short History." *Edutopia*, Oct. 6, 2011. <https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history>.
- 51 "Examples of Social and Emotional Learning in Elementary Mathematics Instruction." *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning - Collaborating States Initiative*, Aug. 2017. <https://drc.casel.org/uploads/sites/3/2019/02/SEL-in-Elementary-Math-8-20-17.pdf>.
- 52 Abigail Shrier. *Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up*. [New York, New York], Sentinel, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024.
- 53 Alexander Gabriel, Deborah Temkin Cahill, Heather Steed, and Kristen Harper. "State laws promoting social, emotional, and academic development leave room for improvement." *Child Trends*, Jan. 14, 2019. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/state-laws-promoting-social-emotional-and-academic-development-leave-room-for-improvement>.
- 54 Libby Stanford and Caitlyn Meisner. "Social-Emotional Learning Persists Despite Political Backlash." *Education Week*, Jul. 27, 2023. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/social-emotional-learning-persists-despite-political-backlash/2023/07>.
- 55 "Funding Social-Emotional Learning at the State Level: Findings and Recommendations to Create Stable, Robust, and Diverse Funding Streams for SEL." *Committee for Children*, 2020. <https://www.cfchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/policy-advocacy/funding-social-emotional-learning-at-the-state-level.pdf>.

- 56 Alia Wong. "Education model wanted students 'to be nice.' That's controversial in Florida now under DeSantis." *USA Today*, Mar. 27, 2023. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2023/03/27/desantis-administrations-war-woke-targets-sel-florida/11414547002/>.
- 57 Manny Diaz, Jr. "February 27, 2023 Letter." *Florida Department of Education*, Feb. 27, 2023. <https://epe.brightspotcdn.com/e8/5f/85a278c68aa299c55babfaad3d0f/content-review.pdf>.
- 58 "Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong." *American Public Media Reports*. <https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>.
- 59 David L. Angus. "Professionalism and the Public Good: A Brief History of Teacher Certification." *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, Jan. 2001. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED449149.pdf>.
- 60 Andrew Bacher-Hicks, Sidrah Baloch, Olivia Chi, Ariel Tichnor-Wagner. "Teacher Licensure and Workforce Quality." *Boston University Wheelock Educational Policy Center*, 2023. <https://wheelockpolicycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Emergency-License-Y2-Report.pdf>.
- 61 Benjamin Backes and Dan Goldhaber. "The Relationship Between Pandemic-Era Teacher Licensure Waivers and Teachers Demographics, Retention, and Effectiveness in New Jersey." *Calder Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research*, 2023. <https://caldercenter.org/publications/relationship-between-pandemic-era-teacher-licensure-waivers-and-teacher-demographics>.
- 62 James Cowan, Dan Goldhaber, Zeyu Jin, and Roddy Theobald. "Assessing Licensure Test Performance and Predictive Validity for Different Teacher Subgroups." *American Educational Research Journal*, 60(6), 1095-1138, Aug. 22, 2023. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/00028312231192365>.
- 63 Dan Goldhaber, Trevor Gratz, and Roddy Theobald. "What's in a teacher test? Assessing the relationship between teacher licensure test scores and student STEM achievement and course-taking." *Journal of Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 61, pg 112-129, December 2017. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775716307038>.
- 64 "When it comes to licensing tests, we need the wisdom of Solomon." *National Council on Teacher Quality*, Jan. 27, 2010. <https://www.nctq.org/blog/When-it-comes-to-licensing-tests,-we-need-the-wisdom-of-Solomon>.
- 65 Linda Gorman. "Teacher Credentials Don't Matter for Student Achievement." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, Aug. 1, 2007. <https://www.nber.org/digest/aug07/teacher-credentials-dont-matter-student-achievement>.
- 66 Douglas N. Harris and Tim R. Sass. "Teacher Training, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement." *National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research*, Mar. 2007. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509656.pdf>.
- 67 Rachel Fradette. "Indiana educators need new literacy training. The rollout is under fire." *WFYI Indianapolis*, Apr. 22, 2024. <https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/pushback-literacy-training-indiana-science-of-reading-ista-teachers>.
- 68 "Student Teaching in the United States." *National Council on Teacher Quality*. https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Student_Teaching_United_States_Executive_Summary_pdf.

- 69 Tamar Lewin. "Training of Teachers Is Flawed, Study Says." *The New York Times*, Jul. 21, 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/21/education/21teaching.html>.
- 70 "Associate Educator Program: Human Resources Information." *Louisiana Department of Education*. https://doe.louisiana.gov/docs/default-source/school-system-support/associate-hr-guidance-docx.pdf?sfvrsn=6e7f6018_0.
- 71 "Career Switcher Program." *Virginia Department of Education*, accessed Feb. 14, 2025. <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/educator-preparation-becoming-a-teacher/career-switcher-program>.
- 72 "Becoming a Certified Texas Educator Through an Alternative Certification Program." *Texas Education Agency*, accessed Feb 14, 2025. <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/preparation-and-continuing-education/becoming-a-certified-texas-educator-through-an-alternative-certification-program>.
- 73 "Educator Preparation Institutes." *Florida Department of Education*, accessed Feb. 14, 2025. <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/preparation/epi.stml>.
- 74 "Routes to Certification." *Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education*, accessed Feb. 14, 2025. <https://dese.mo.gov/educator-quality/certification/routes-certification>.
- 75 "Alternative Licensure Paths." *Indiana Department of Education*, accessed Feb. 14, 2025. <https://www.in.gov/doe/educators/educator-licensing/alternative-licensure-paths/>.
- 76 "Other Certificates & Endorsements: Michigan Alternative Route to Certification." *University of Michigan Marsal Family School of Education*, accessed Feb. 14, 2025. <https://marsal.umich.edu/academics-admissions/degrees/other-certificates-endorsements/michigan-alternate-route-certification>.
- 77 Alyssa Evans, Cassidy Francies, and Tiffany McDole. "50-State Comparison: Teacher License Reciprocity." *Education Commission of the States*, Jun. 24, 2020. <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-teacher-license-reciprocity/>.
- 78 CBS Miami Team. "Gov. DeSantis signs measure that 'prohibits indoctrination' of prospective teachers." *CBS News*, May 2, 2024. <https://www.cbsnews.com/miami/news/gov-desantis-signs-measure-that-prohibits-indoctrination-of-prospective-teachers/>.
- 79 "CS/HB 1219: Educator Preparation Programs." *Florida House of Representatives 2024 Legislature*, Jul. 1, 2024. <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2024/1291/BillText/er/PDF>.
- 80 Sara Randazzo and Matt Barnum. "A Record Number of Kids Are in Special Education—and It's Getting Harder to Help Them All." *Wall Street Journal*, Jun. 20, 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/special-education-student-growth-teachers-understaffed-20efa9da>.
- 81 "Free Appropriate Public Education." *U.S. Department of Education*, accessed Feb. 10, 2025. <https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/free-appropriate-public-education>.
- 82 "Students With Disabilities." *National Center for Education Statistics*, May 2024. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>.

- 83 “Sec. 300.309 Determining the existence of a specific learning disability.” *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, May 25, 2018. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.309>.
- 84 Kalman R. Hettleman. “Hettleman: Most Students in Special Education Don’t Need to Be There. It’s Time to End the Broken Promises and Reinvent the Process.” *The 74*, Aug. 20, 2020. <https://www.the74million.org/article/hettleman-most-students-in-special-education-dont-need-to-be-there-its-time-to-end-the-broken-promises-and-reinvent-the-process/>.
- 85 Julie Rawe. “The 13 disability categories under IDEA.” *Understood*, Apr. 9, 2024. <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/conditions-covered-under-idea>.
- 86 “Frequently Asked Questions: Section 504 Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).” *U.S. Department of Education*, accessed Feb. 10, 2025. <https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/civil-rights-laws/disability-discrimination/frequently-asked-questions-section-504-fape>.
- 87 “Section 504 Protections for Students with Cancer.” *U.S. Department of Education*, Jun. 2024. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-factsheet-cancer-202406.pdf>.
- 88 Abigail Shrier. *Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren’t Growing Up*. [New York, New York], Sentinel, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024.
- 89 Maria M. Lewis and Raquel Muñiz. “Section 504 Plans: Examining Inequitable Access and Misuse.” *National Education Policy Center*, Jun. 8, 2023. <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/504-plan>.
- 90 Nicole Homerin. “Are Students Getting False Diagnoses To Get Accommodations for Extended Time?” *We Are Teachers*, Apr. 22, 2024. <https://www.weareteachers.com/accommodations-for-extra-time-misuse/>.
- 91 Kalman R. Hettleman. “Back to the future: How to rescue and reinvent special education.” *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, Jun. 5, 2019. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/back-future-how-rescue-and-reinvent-special-education>.
- 92 Jay P. Greene. “A Special Plan for Palin.” *National Review Online*, Sept. 9, 2008. <https://manhattan.institute/article/a-special-plan-for-palin>.



By cutting the red tape and the regulations that get in the way of teachers who are just trying to do their jobs, we can make a system in which teachers put their skills to work and enable students to learn and thrive.