When the Classroom Turns Hostile

A Strategic Response to Extremism and Antisemitism in K-12 Education

Published by the North American Values Institute (NAVI) | **February 2026**

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NORTH AMERICAN VALUES INSTITUTE

Acknowledgements

About NAVI

The mission of the North American Values Institute (NAVI) is to promote American civic values and combat extremist ideologies in K-12 education through research, advocacy, parent mobilization, and coalition-building at the local, state, and national levels. Our vision is a high-quality K-12 education system that nurtures informed, capable, and civically grounded students who are free from radical ideologies and guided by the shared values that uphold American liberal democracy.

Founded in May 2021 as the Jewish Institute for Liberal Values, NAVI originally focused on the growing influence of radical social justice ideology inside and outside the Jewish community. Within a year, it became clear that the most important and under-addressed front in the spread of extremist ideology and rising antisemitism was the K-12 education system. In response, we focused our mission and relaunched as the North American Values Institute, dedicated to restoring academic integrity, open inquiry, and free expression in America's schools.

Today, NAVI works with a growing coalition of parents, educators, elected officials, and philanthropists to ensure that the next generation of children receives an education rooted in Western, liberal democratic principles — what we call American civic values.

As our nation marks 250 years, this work is critical to securing America's future.

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Executive Summary

The Nature of the Problem in K-12 Education

Rising extremism and antisemitism in K-12 education are the result of the systemic ideological capture of America's schools and institutions. The problem is not primarily ignorance or insufficient education about bias. It is institutional and political.

Academic theories of power and identity now function as an ideological operating system across teacher training programs, teacher unions, and school board governance, replacing learning with political activism. Once embedded, this framework distorts history, suppresses dissent, undermines civil rights enforcement, and normalizes hostility toward America, Jews, Israel, Western values, and liberal democracy.

Most efforts to address antisemitism in schools focus on symptoms rather than causes. Current approaches, such as additional Jewish or Holocaust education, staff trainings, or civil rights complaints, are necessary, but insufficient in addressing an ideological system that continually suppresses dissent and reinforces bias. In some cases, well-intentioned interventions merely entrench the underlying framework that produced the problem.

As a result, extremism and antisemitism persist, learning declines, and civic norms erode, especially in large urban districts and surrounding suburbs where ideological networks are most entrenched.

How Ideology Enters and Spreads in K-12 Education

This white paper maps the primary vectors of ideological transmission in K-12 education: schools of education, alternative pathways to teacher certification, and accreditation systems that frame teaching as activism; teacher unions that push political agendas into training, materials, and professional norms; politicized curricula and activist nonprofits that supply ready-made instructional content; state bureaucracies that codify ideology through standards, licensure, and credentialing; school boards and district leadership that operationalize these frameworks; informal teacher networks and social media that normalize educator activism; and foreign funding that influences content and training.

Together, these elements form a reinforcing ecosystem that no single intervention can dismantle.

NAVI's Comprehensive Strategy to Restore K-12 Education

Restoring educational integrity requires comprehensive action across the entire K-12 ecosystem: reforming teacher pipelines and accreditation; confronting politicized unions and advocacy networks; using state policy, oversight, and civil rights enforcement to impose accountability; empowering school boards, parents, and principled educators; restoring rigorous, standards-based curricula; building broad, cross-partisan and multi-ethnic coalitions; shaping upstream cultural narratives that impact public understanding; and curtailing foreign funding and influence.

American civic values — pluralism, tolerance, fairness, academic excellence, and democratic self-government — must replace the ideological frameworks now rooted in many schools. These are the shared civic values, neither conservative nor progressive, that have allowed a diverse nation, including Jewish communities, to flourish.

This paper offers a strategic framework for Jewish organizations and philanthropies and identifies where fields are underdeveloped and where investment is most urgently needed.

How to Use This White Paper

When the Classroom Turns Hostile is written primarily for Jewish philanthropic and communal leaders concerned with ideological extremism and antisemitism in K-12 education.

This white paper is meant to serve as a practical reference for confronting a challenge that is too complex for any single intervention or organization. While the analysis and strategies outlined here may be relevant to a broader set of stakeholders – including policy advocates, coalition partners, and legal practitioners working to restore educational integrity – this white paper speaks directly to Jewish communal leaders and funders in order to invite their leadership in addressing this challenge.

Meeting today's challenges requires a multifaceted strategy across multiple sectors. Use this white paper as a common reference point to align priorities, identify points of leverage, and coordinate actions required to protect children, strengthen schools, and sustain the civic foundations essential to the American Jewish community and to a healthy democratic society.

Introduction

Why publish this white paper, *When the Classroom Turns Hostile*?

American education faces a crisis that is political at its core. Across the country, activist ideologies have become dominant in many of our school systems, embedding an oppressor/oppressed worldview into curricula, teacher training, teacher union activities, and school culture. This framework teaches children to view America, Jews, Israel, and Western democratic values through a distorting lens. It replaces academic learning with political activism and institutionalizes a worldview that fuels anti-American and antisemitic attitudes. The result is weakened academic achievement, degraded civic formation, and a politicized school culture that harms students across backgrounds.

Why issue this white paper now?

The threat is accelerating. A loosely coordinated anti-American and anti-Western "red–green alliance" of radical progressive and Islamist activists is rapidly expanding its influence through aggressive political operations that influence local elections, school boards, and district policy. The problem manifests in both public and private schools, and shows up most acutely in big cities and expands outward to the nearby suburbs and even rural areas; nowhere is entirely immune from this threat. Current efforts to counter the problem of ideological extremism and antisemitism fall short because many well-meaning organizations see the crisis as primarily educational instead of what it is: political.

We can't fight a political problem with an educational solution. It's time to honestly reckon with the problem and advance a comprehensive set of solutions.

As ideological pressures on schools have intensified, many have struggled to fulfill their most basic mission: teaching students to read, write, and do math. With a few notable exceptions, particularly in parts of the South, academic outcomes have declined, drawing national attention to both what schools are teaching and how they are teaching it. This moment creates a rare opportunity to reassert proven instructional practices and shared civic foundations, not as a political reaction, but as a practical response to educational approaches that have diverted schools from their core responsibilities.

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The stakes could not be higher. As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, a milestone that invites us to reflect on the Enlightenment values that birthed our civic tradition, we must meet this moment. The future of our democracy depends on whether we can restore education to its core purpose.

Why NAVI?

NAVI works closely with parents, educators, and partner organizations across the K-12 education landscape. Through this sustained engagement and collaboration, NAVI has gained a clear view of how ideological activism influences institutional power and decision-making and why current responses are inadequate.

NAVI approaches this work with humility. No single organization has all the answers or can address the problem alone. NAVI offers this white paper as a synthesis of field experience and analysis, intended to clarify the nature of the challenge and contribute to a broader collective effort to restore American civic values – free expression, fairness, tolerance, and open inquiry – to our nation's K-12 school system.

What is the purpose of *When the Classroom Turns Hostile*?

In this white paper, NAVI maps the problem and provides a strategic framework for a comprehensive response. We aim to build awareness and capacity among the many organizations and leaders working toward providing solutions at scale, with the optimism that, working together, we can change the trajectory of American K-12 education.

This paper does not attempt to map every source of extremism and antisemitism in American life. Illiberalism and antisemitism on the political right are rising and warrant serious attention. But they are not structurally embedded in the nation's education system. This paper focuses on the dominant driver of extremism and antisemitism in K-12 education: the ideological capture of educational institutions by radical activists.

This paper (1) identifies the nature and scope of the problem, (2) outlines a comprehensive framework for the solution, and (3) aims to catalyze collaboration among organizations committed to restoring educational integrity to our nation's K-12 schools. By working together on this critical mission, we can restore education's essential purpose: to equip every child with the core academic skills, knowledge, reasoning, and shared civic values necessary to uphold a free society.

Part 1

How Ideology Enters and Spreads in K-12 Education

The Ideological Landscape

To better understand the problem, we have to confront the ideological forces that have reshaped our educational systems.

Over the last few decades, activists have pushed academic theories of power and identity into K-12 classrooms.[1] These theories — rooted in post-Marxist, postcolonial, and critical scholarship developed in university settings — were shaped and amplified by a convergence of ideological currents. Those currents include Soviet anti-Zionism, Arab nationalist and Islamist opposition to Israel, and postcolonial political movements, which together gave rise to concepts such as "settler colonialism" that now function as a governing interpretive framework in educational settings.[2]

While the work of ideological thinkers like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Paulo Freire, and Edward Said is rarely taught explicitly in K-12 classrooms, their theories impact how curricula, pedagogy, and norms are defined, much as earlier educational theorists like Maria Montessori and John Dewey previously shaped education. These theories have transformed educational standards, teacher training programs, curricula, and administrations in entire school systems across the nation.[3] What began as openly political ideas now influence even our youngest students.[4]

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These ideas form a comprehensive worldview that functions as an operating system with its own moral logic.[5] The system divides society into rigid identity categories of oppressor and oppressed,[6] interpreting every institution, historical event, and social interaction through that simplistic binary lens.[7] In schools, these ideas are often expressed through frameworks such as "equity," "decolonization," "liberation," or "critical consciousness," which influence all aspects of the learning environment.

Over time, this worldview takes on a dogmatic quality that presents assumptions as settled truth rather than ideas to be examined. In its most radical forms, it portrays objective standards such as punctuality and meritocracy as features of "white supremacy culture,"[8] frames neutral principles such as individual rights as instruments of oppression,[9] and calls for the dismantling of both Israel and America.[10]

But dogma — whether it comes from the political left or right — has no place in public education. Schools exist to cultivate reasoning, understanding, and independent judgment. When an ideology can't be challenged, learning stops. Children are taught to obey instead of question. Schools become platforms for indoctrinating children to believe what a select group of teachers believe, instead of cultivating intellectual and civic development.

But dogma — whether it comes from the political left or right — has no place in public education.

This problem is especially acute in K-12 education. Unlike college students, elementary and secondary students are still forming cognitive frameworks and developing the capacity for independent critical thought. As a result, they are especially susceptible and more likely to absorb politicized narratives as settled truths rather than ideas to be examined critically.

Many schools and institutions adopt this worldview in more moderate forms, often led by well-intentioned administrators seeking to create inclusive environments. In practice, they establish "equity" offices with the stated goal of expanding representation and improving learning outcomes for marginalized students, despite little evidence that such programs are effective. These initiatives, which focus on vague objectives such as feelings of belonging, distract from core academics and soften the ground for more radical interpretations to take

hold among educators and students. By reinforcing the oppressor/oppressed lens, they encourage grievance and victimhood, deprive children of agency, and create environments in which dissenting students and teachers, including Jews, face increased bullying and harassment.[11] Ironically, through a preoccupation with differing identities, these initiatives often generate less, not more, belonging and inclusion.[12] The framework is especially prone to distorting Jewish identity and history, depicting Israel and Zionists and any group with perceived power as oppressors.[13]

Once a school embraces this framework, even in moderate forms and with good faith efforts, it discourages debate and rewards conformity. What's more, once embedded in a system, the moderate forms tend to act as a "gateway drug" to more extreme expressions. It is the underlying framework, not the severity of its expression, that allows extreme versions of the ideology to take root.

It is important to underscore that many educators who embrace ideological frameworks, often in the name of "equity," do so in good faith. Many teachers and administrators enter the profession with sincere commitments to helping all students succeed. However, over time, those concerns become

subsumed into a rigid ideological framework that redefines education not as the transmission of knowledge and civic formation, but as a vehicle for political activism and social transformation. What often begins as an effort to address inequities ultimately produces illiberal outcomes that undermine learning, pluralism, and the civic mission of public education.

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To be sure, education must not paper over historical wrongs and injustices. Students must understand the struggles, progress, and contributions of various peoples over time. They should engage with multiple perspectives and ideas so that they can learn to evaluate evidence critically and form their own independent judgment. Education of our children is undermined, however, when schools present a singular view, reduce individuals to group identities, and erode shared civic identity by arguing for the dismantling of democratic values and institutions.

The transformation of education reflects a broader political realignment over the past decades. Data show that the Democratic Party has shifted markedly to the left over the last two decades:[14]

Positions once considered moderate or centrist came to be viewed as conservative, and

Democrats have shifted sharply lefwards on cultural issues in recent years, leaving the median voter behind

Average position of Americans who identify as strong Democrats and strong Republicans, compared to the median voter

Source: *Financial Times* analysis of US General Social Survey
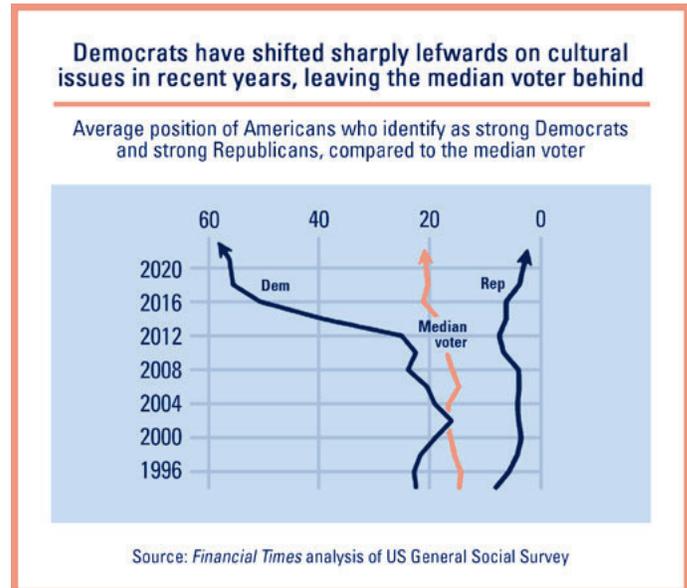
education – already a left-leaning field – became more ideologically charged and narrower. Within this ideological frame, education philanthropists often adopt a strategic position shaped by the concern that being perceived as too conservative would limit their effectiveness. As a result, efforts to restore balance fail because even the "center" remains left-of-center in the broader national context.

Another force accelerating this ideological capture is the "red-green alliance,"[15] a loose political coalition of radical progressives and Islamists united by their opposition to Western norms.[16] On the "red" side, progressive activists rooted in socialist or Marxist frameworks seek economic and social transformation through critiques of capitalism and liberal democratic institutions. Many of these activist organizations intersect with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA),[17] which has been explicit about its strategy to build power through the nation's education system.[18] The DSA urges members to enter the field in order to "transform our schools, our unions, and our society."[19]

On the "green" side, Islamist actors pursue illiberal objectives through long-term institutional influence rather than overt violence, an approach explicitly described in their internal documents.[20] Substantial foreign funding flows into Western educational and civic institutions through networks of state actors and aligned foundations. Like the influence efforts undertaken by China and Russia,[21] Qatar's multi-billion-dollar investments, channeled through universities, NGOs, media, and cultural initiatives, are best understood as long-term efforts to weaken liberal norms and embed Islamist-aligned narratives within civil society.[22] Despite profound differences in worldview and ultimate goals, actors in the "red-green alliance" come together around shared opposition to Western liberal norms, democratic pluralism, and the legitimacy of existing civic institutions.

Many inside and outside the Jewish community privately recognize that extreme ideology foments both antisemitism and anti-American sentiment. But they have been reluctant to publicly recognize the root of the problem because they continue to believe that their allies are found in left-leaning spaces, a belief that imposes structural constraints on their ability to reexamine their strategies and political alliances. Yet, as Jewish Funders Network CEO Andres Spokoiny recently wrote, we must take a hard look at the "ever-evolving threat" of antisemitism and recognize that it "demands that we continually reassess our approach and adapt to [its] mutations."[23] Today, those mutations appear in activism and extremism in K-12 schools, driven by ideological influence in some cases and outright institutional capture in others.

Addressing this challenge may require adopting positions that cut across familiar political alignments, while also remaining firmly grounded in core liberal principles such as pluralism, individual rights, and equal protection. These principles, which in recent years have been coded as right-wing, are in reality grounded in the liberal, shared values that sustain our democracy.

> Real change requires us to have the courage and resilience to speak truthfully and unapologetically about the problem...

Real change requires us to have the courage and resilience to speak truthfully and unapologetically about the problem and to organize our efforts around a shared vision of American society. We must bring moral clarity rooted in universal values and lead the way to inspire others to join us in finding solutions.

Sources and Vectors of Transmission

Ideological influence manifests across the field of K-12 education, though school systems are not uniformly affected. Schools fall along a continuum, ranging from those where activist frameworks are deeply embedded in policy, curricula, and professional norms, to those where such influences remain isolated among individual activists rather than incorporated into the governing framework. The problem is more concentrated in some geographic areas than others.

Addressing the problem requires understanding where this ideology originates and how it moves through K-12 schools. Key vectors — including teacher preparation programs, union activities, activist nonprofits — drive the transmission of ideological content throughout K-12 education.

Teacher Pipelines: Schools of Education, Alternative Pathways, and Accreditation

Schools of education and accreditation structures are key sources of the ideological frameworks that influence K-12 schools.[24] While most teachers are trained in traditional education schools, many enter the profession through alternative pathways to certification, which have increasingly adopted the same ideological agendas.

Teacher preparation programs frequently require coursework that treats education as a vehicle for social change rather than academic learning.[25] One of the most frequently assigned texts is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Brazilian education philosopher Paulo Freire,[26] which argues that the purpose of education is to awaken students' critical consciousness to their social, political, and economic oppression.[27]

Freire's ideas were translated and institutionalized by scholars such as Henry Giroux, who argued that education is inherently political and that claims of neutrality serve existing power structures. He urged teachers to see themselves as "transformative intellectuals" responsible not merely for instruction, but for producing political and social outcomes through their pedagogical choices. By extending Freirean theory to feminism, race, and social justice in U.S. schools, Giroux helped embed an activist conception of education in teacher preparation programs. This orientation was further reinforced by theorists such as Edward Said, whose critique of Western intellectual traditions — particularly as applied to Jewish history, Zionism, and Israel — has contributed to educational frameworks that treat Jewish identity and political self-determination primarily through the lens of domination.

Over time, institutions responsible for training and credentialing teachers have adopted these politicized approaches to teaching. With the institutionalization of these ideas, most

prospective teachers learn that education is a tool for social justice and transformation.[28] Upon graduation, some enter classrooms as activists, primed to interpret curricular requirements through this lens and to reproduce the same frameworks that trained them by teaching children to become activists themselves.

Rather than counter this influence, the national and regional accreditation bodies that oversee teacher education programs reinforce it. Accreditation by non-governmental organizations, recognized primarily by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation,[29] shapes institutional priorities, which cascade through state approval and licensure systems. State bureaucracies rely on these accreditations when determining eligibility for teacher licensure and approving continuing education programs that teachers are required to complete. Recent federal efforts to reform higher education accreditation standards[30] reflect growing concern about the power of accrediting bodies to shape institutional priorities. While these actions do not target K-12 education directly, they can shape teachers colleges and educator preparation programs in higher education.

Teacher Unions

Over the past two decades, the national teacher unions and many of their state and local affiliates have expanded their role beyond traditional public labor advocacy, focused on teacher pay and working conditions, toward the advancement of extreme social justice agendas.[31] While teacher unions have long participated in politics, they now increasingly define their professional identity and mission around an oppressor/oppressed worldview, embedding ideological

agendas into professional norms, bargaining priorities, and policy advocacy.

This shift results from a growing trend of "social justice unionism,"[32] in which a small but highly organized group of activists treats union leadership as a vehicle for their political agendas. Social justice unionism reframes the union's mission from representing educators' professional interests toward fighting perceived systemic oppression.[33]

While most union members are not activists and remain disengaged from union politics, social justice unionists tend to be highly motivated and organize caucuses that seek and win leadership positions. This dynamic enables a small ideological minority to gain disproportionate control over union leadership, steering teachers into broader political movements,[34] influencing elections such as New York City's recent mayoral race,[35] and pushing unions into explicit positions on foreign policy, policing, immigration, and Israel.[36] These caucuses are often run by senior members of the Democratic Socialists of America and LaborNotes.[37]

The nation's two largest teacher unions, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, have largely adopted social justice unionism,[38] which manifests in the endorsement of politicized materials, professional development, and one-sided political resolutions framed as social justice. For example, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) circulated deeply antisemitic materials to its approximately 117,000 members – including a poster of a dollar bill formed into the Star of David – and others that appeared to glorify Palestinian terrorism.[39] It also approved training for its members on the alleged "weaponization" of antisemitism.[40] Its bias was

significant enough that current and former MTA presidents were called to testify before the state's Special Commission on Combatting Antisemitism.[41]

At the national level, the NEA promoted resources that removed Israel from maps, amplified groups with extremist ties, and circulated narratives that defended the October 7th attacks.[42] The endorsement of these materials by the nation's largest teacher union illustrates how comfortable major educational institutions have become in promoting openly radical content.
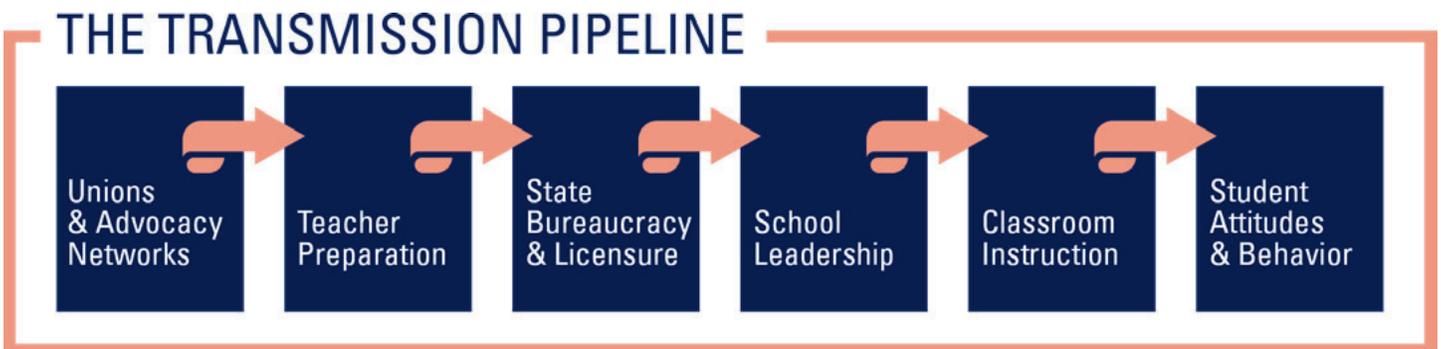
Ethnic Studies and Politicized Curricula

The growth of ethnic studies in K-12 schools is a clear manifestation of the ideological shift in education. Despite an academic-sounding name that appears to describe the study of cultures and groups, ethnic studies is actually a political movement, rooted in the oppressor/oppressed framework, that was developed by activists in California in the late 1960s. Its goal has always been to use education to foster political activism.[43]

California's recent ethnic studies mandate, which has received significant national attention, remains unfunded, and many districts are now considering rolling back their programs.[44] However, the influence of ethnic studies activists extends well beyond California.

Minnesota now requires high schools to offer a course in ethnic studies,[45] and state social studies standards incorporate ethnic studies into K-8 history, civics, and geography coursework.[46] There are 27 other states and Washington D.C. that include ethnic studies concepts in their social studies standards, including Texas, Oregon, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

Even where courses in ethnic studies have not been mandated, curricula and lessons are often explicitly structured around the same ideological frameworks, even if they seem relatively benign. For example, the social studies curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia teaches foreign policy through a lens of racism.[47] One lesson asks students to replace the national anthem; another asks them to write a letter in defense of critical race theory,[48] and another, called "Teaching Palestine-Israel from the Perspective of Civil Rights and Black Power Activists," conflates complex global conflicts with ideological views of race and racism.[49]

According to Network Contagion Research Institute, the New York City Board of Education permitted teachers to use "educational materials that often present a one-sided narrative on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, featuring Israel as the oppressor."[50]

Official or approved curricula are only part of the story. In today's educational free-for-all, many teachers effectively build their own curriculum using crowd-sourced platforms, Google searches, and activist networks, often bypassing district-approved materials altogether. Without knowledge-rich content anchoring instruction, children end up learning their teachers' personal political agendas.[51]

Radical Activist Networks and Advocacy Organizations

External advocacy groups – including Middle East-focused organizations, groups promoting ideological versions of social emotional learning, segments of the climate justice movement, and political actors – produce ready-made lesson plans,[52] professional development workshops,[53] and campaigns that invite teachers to organize children around political causes.[54]

Schools and school districts formally partner with professional development organizations that present themselves as experts though they operate as activists. For example, San Mateo Unified School District in California contracted with Acosta Educational Partnership (AEP) to train teachers in ethnic studies instruction; AEP's team included an educator calling for the "overthrow" of the United States.[55] School partnerships with such groups mean that districts adopt activist materials and teacher training,

which creates a pipeline of influence on classroom content and instruction.

Some of the extreme materials are distributed through informal connections. Activist teachers in schools and districts create and distribute politicized content through their personal networks, without oversight or accountability to school leadership. School teachers in Philadelphia, for example, contributed to Rethinking Schools – a nonprofit publisher and advocacy organization that promotes activist, social-justice curricula – by developing "Teaching Palestine" lessons and then organized Rethinking Schools-sponsored study groups, which distributed free copies of the book to other teachers in the district.[56]

These off-the-books professional development groups train educators in organizing tactics, anti-Israel messaging, and activism-centered pedagogy.[57] Their materials end up in classrooms through online marketplaces like Teachers Pay Teacher, which allow politicized content to spread nationally with no school oversight.[58] These networks move faster than districts can monitor, if they are so inclined, and often operate entirely outside official curriculum review processes.

Social Media

Many educators and teacher union leaders use social media to promote extreme political agendas. Because their profiles are often public, students and community members can easily access this content. Activist educators and organizations also network with one another online, amplifying each other's posts, events, and materials.

An example from the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) highlights the problem. The vice

president of the CTU, Jackson Potter, has frequently posted anti-Israel content and narratives that portray Israel as an apartheid state.[59] Another CTU member, Fadi Abughoush, who teaches in the Chicago Public Schools, has posted pro-Hamas content, antisemitic cartoons, and anti-Israel statements to his public Instagram. Abughoush also posts images of his students in his classroom preparing posters with anti-Israel messages such as "Israel has blood on their hands."[60] Social media functions as an accelerant for ideological capture and groupthink, allowing activist educators and union leaders to broadcast extreme political content, coordinate networks, and expose students to one-sided and often antisemitic narratives.

Generational Change and Erosion of Professional Norms

Generational shifts reinforce the ideological drift in education. Americans under 30 — including new teachers, administrators, and staff — are significantly more likely to view the world through a binary of oppressor and oppressed, to distrust Western institutions, and to carry activist agendas into professional roles.[61] This cohort is more receptive to ideological narratives that frame America, the West, and Israel as colonizers and oppressors. Their beliefs and professional choices accelerate the transformation of school culture.

With the ideological "permission structure" now in place, some educators use their positions to advance personal agendas in ways that violate core professional and ethical standards. Last year, at a teacher union meeting, a California teacher said he encouraged his students to

> ...educators use their positions to advance personal agendas in ways that violate core professional and ethical standards.

attend protests as part of his presentation called, "How to be a teacher & an organizer. . . and NOT get fired."[62] In Philadelphia, teachers recruited students to a private Signal chat for anti-Israel activists who share the belief that "All resistance is righteous."[63] In Illinois, a teacher who displayed a partisan poster in the classroom claimed First Amendment protections that do not apply to public school employees in their professional roles.[64] Teachers commit educational malpractice when they blur professional boundaries, use their authority to promote personal political views, or mobilize students for activism.

Teacher unions play a decisive role in shaping employment and tenure rules, which make it extraordinarily difficult to remove teachers for ideological misconduct or persistent incompetence. These rules function as a protective shield, allowing even extreme ideological behavior to persist in classrooms, often with little or no consequence.

State Bureaucracies

State education agencies often play a central role in advancing social justice mandates[65] and embedding political frameworks within K-12 systems.[66] These frameworks operate through professional development programs, curriculum

standards, state accreditation, district compliance, and state-controlled district funding. In many states, for example, teacher licensure rules and mandatory training requirements embed "equity" competencies – which typically evaluate adherence to ideological frameworks or completion of identity-based training – directly into the teacher pipeline, making them prerequisites for entering or advancing in the profession.[67]

States differ significantly in how much authority they delegate: some, like Georgia, impose statewide mandatory standards and curricular frameworks, while others, such as Michigan, set broad standards but leave curriculum decisions to districts under a system often described as "local control." These structural differences determine how much authority a particular district or school board has to adopt, resist, or modify ideological initiatives.

Yet even in states with substantial local autonomy, the state still defines the policy environment. Standards, licensure rules, and teacher-preparation requirements create the conditions under which districts operate. And because only states have the authority to create or dismantle these bureaucratic systems, their ideological influence can persist even in the face of opposition from parents and communities.

School Boards, Administrations, and Local Political Institutions

School boards have the authority to set academic priorities, adopt curricula, oversee discipline and civil rights enforcement, negotiate with unions, hire superintendents, and shape district culture. They exercise this authority within the constraints of the state policy environment.

Local adoption of ideological frameworks occurs through both state mandates and local initiatives. Boards and administrations may introduce activist curricular frameworks, programming, or training to comply with state mandates, or concede to local activists who promote favored political agendas.

In some cases, activist board members and administrators – sometimes supported by political organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) or the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) — use their roles to steer district policy toward political goals rather than educational integrity. For example, a number of school boards passed one-sided ceasefire resolutions in the immediate aftermath of the October 7th attack on Israel.[68]

Activist networks have targeted local political structures – city councils, local party committees, school board races, and mayoral offices – and used these positions both to influence school systems and as platforms for broader political aspirations.[69] For example, during a California school board meeting that featured open antisemitism from a DSA-endorsed board member,[70] an activist explained that they had "flipped the board" by electing candidates supportive of a contract with a "liberatory" ethnic studies group.[71]

The politicization of school boards, administrations, and local political institutions has produced predictable downstream problems: inconsistent enforcement of civil rights protections; "equity" offices and initiatives in schools that turn ideology into practice; curriculum purchases that ignore sound

standards and transparency; and ineffective responses to antisemitism and other forms of harassment. Parents often have limited insight into how decisions are made and how to correct these failures.

Foreign Funding

Foreign funding plays a key role in transmitting ideology that fuels anti-American, anti-Western, and antisemitic sentiment. Entities such as Qatar Foundation International (QFI) and Confucius Institutes provide grants, teacher-training programs, and curricular materials that embed ideological narratives and often hostile views toward America, Israel, and Zionism into K-12 education.[72] For example, QFI has provided a Chicago Public Schools Arabic

teacher, Fadi Abughoush, with funding for frequent trips to Qatar, as well as for class trips both to Qatar and extremist mosques in Illinois.[73] Qatar also sponsored the Choices Program, a widely used curriculum which its host, Brown University, dropped after the curriculum's false narratives about the Middle East came to light.[74] Multiple state and local school systems subsequently removed the curriculum.[75]

A recent report documents patterns of Turkey-linked influence within the CAIR ecosystem, including engagement with state-linked institutions and the use of facilities owned and operated by a foreign government for youth, civic, and political programming in the United States. These findings underscore how foreign-state alignment can intersect with domestic advocacy and education-related activity.[76]

THE HOSTILE CLASSROOM

FOREIGN FUNDING

STRUCTURAL

| Accreditation Bodies | State Bureaucracies | Education Schools | Teacher Unions |

OPERATIONAL

| Professional Development | School Boards | Activist Teachers and Administrators | NGOs, Advocacy Groups and Networks |

STUDENTS IN THE HOSTILE CLASSROOM
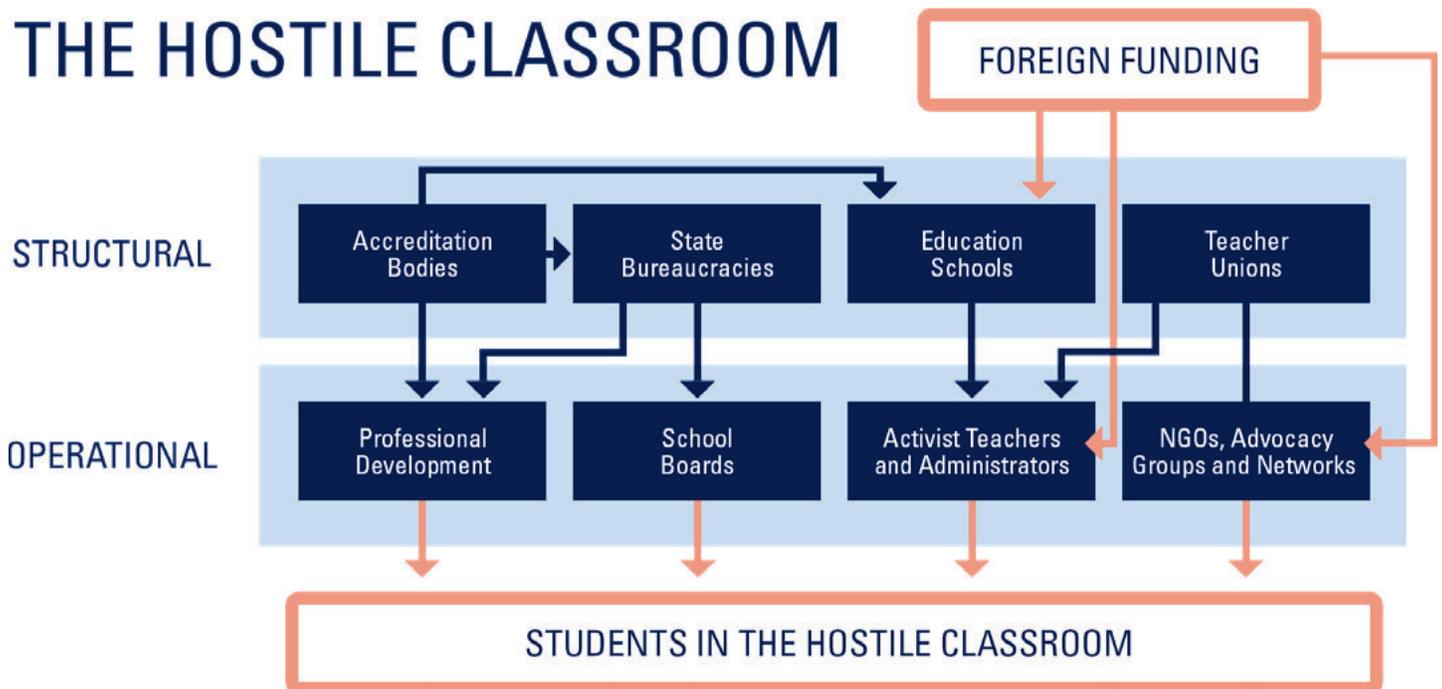
Responses are So Far Inadequate

Many in the Jewish world understandably see today's crisis primarily as rising antisemitism, rather than growing ideological capture. That view has driven much of the Jewish community's response to the problem. Major investments of funding and professional influence have been directed toward combatting the symptoms of antisemitism in schools and public life.

Much of the field remains anchored in the belief that the core problem is ignorance, and that the solution is primarily one of education -— better curricula, more teacher trainings, and expanded programs on Holocaust education and Jewish history, identity, and civilization.[77]

Many organizations have done important work within this framework. They run valuable educational programs, document harassment and bullying, support affected students and teachers, conduct investigations, litigate civil rights violations, advance the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, and educate school leaders and lawmakers. This work has delivered important tactical wins through litigation, IHRA definition adoption, and some meaningful alliances. These efforts help ensure safety, raise awareness, and hold schools and systems accountable.

But much of these efforts largely focus on symptoms, not the underlying systemic problem. Without confronting the political drivers, even the strongest responses to antisemitism will fall short. As Jewish Theological Seminary Professor Jack Wertheimer explained in Mosaic, a growing consensus among Jewish professionals themselves is that "[w]hat's been done in the past hasn't worked."[78]

Educating students about Jews and Israel simply cannot succeed within an ideological operating system that views Israel and Jews as oppressors. Recent research from the Network Contagion Research Institute shows that identity-based "anti-oppression" pedagogy, including widely used anti-bias and DEI curricula, can actually increase hostility.[79]

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Within these frameworks, new information about Jews or Israel is filtered through the same oppressor/oppressed lens that produced the problem, meaning that more education about Jews cannot correct the underlying distortion. This is the core issue. Without changing the paradigm, education can not inoculate against bias. It transmits it.

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Current efforts fail to engage the political and institutional arenas where school policy is set. They do not incentivize schools to confront the anti-Western ideology that has captured the field of education. In fact, some Jewish organizations have been willing to offer their support for the underlying ideological premise of these pedagogies in return for guarantees that courses will not explicitly criticize Jews or Israel or that new courses will be created to provide instruction about Jews. While understandably appealing, these tradeoffs only reinforce the underlying problem rather than resolve it.

Real progress requires a shift in strategy. Organizations and philanthropies need a new theory of change that will, in the words of Jewish Funders Network CEO Andres Spokoiny, "challenge preconceived notions about the fight against antisemitism and the battlefield upon which it is fought."[80]

Some in the philanthropic community have drawn a bright line in their minds and in their giving between fighting antisemitism on **the one hand and instilling civic values on the other.** This is a category error that will likely lead to lopsided philanthropic commitments to educational solutions. Hard as such change may be to effectuate, we must aspire to replace the underlying operating system in K-12 classrooms. Pedagogical band aids cannot stop the hemorrhaging.

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We must unapologetically appeal to the shared, unassailable principles — pluralism, tolerance, academic excellence, and the civic norms of a liberal democracy — that have allowed Jews and all Americans to thrive.[82] We need to fashion new, broad-based coalitions and a comprehensive ecosystem to strengthen American civic values and confront the ideology that undermines them.

Consequences: Why This Matters for Everyone

The classroom is where citizens are formed.

The classroom is where citizens are formed. It is where young people gain the knowledge and habits needed for democratic life, including how to think, how to question, and how to live alongside those who see the world differently. When education becomes politicized, children are no longer prepared for citizenship in a diverse democracy. Instead, they are trained to adopt an ideological lens that rewards conformity, penalizes dissent, and replaces inquiry with activism. What we are confronting now is a fundamental shift in the very purpose of education.

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When schools embed ideology, students quickly conclude that there is one acceptable answer. They understand that disagreement carries social or academic costs. Teachers who raise concerns about such practices often face professional or social consequences. This narrowing of permissible viewpoints undermines the shared mission of education – reasoning, civil discourse, and engagement with facts and multiple perspectives – that makes democratic life possible.

Within this ideological framework, schools normalize hostility to the West and antisemitism. Students are often encouraged to condemn American and Western institutions before they have had the chance to understand them or grapple with their failures, progress, or achievements.[83]

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At the same time, academic decline has become widespread. Civic knowledge has eroded; most young Americans cannot name the three branches of government or explain the principles of the Constitution.[84] Literacy and numeracy have also fallen sharply,[85] leaving a generation of students less equipped to reason critically, evaluate evidence, or engage constructively with disagreement. Disadvantaged

students, who depend most on strong schools, bear the greatest cost of these failures.[86] Against the backdrop of educational decay, a renewed focus on strong academics and American civic values offers a clear counter to the pedagogies that fuel extremism and antisemitism.

Jews are the canary in the coal mine. What begins with the Jews never ends with the Jews.[87] Jewish students and teachers are facing rising harassment as ideological frameworks cast them as "oppressors." But a worldview that casts Jews as oppressors can be turned against anyone. It fosters a dehumanizing logic that treats disfavored people as symbols of a group identity rather than as individuals.

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And as this ideology takes root in blue cities and school systems, it triggers an illiberal backlash on the right.[88] Left-wing identity politics gives rise to right-wing identity politics, which accelerates the broader unraveling of liberal norms that protect everyone.

The future of our democracy depends on what happens in K-12 schools. The habits of mind that sustain a free society must be nurtured in classrooms.[89] If those habits disappear from schools, they will not suddenly appear in public life later. A society that lacks reason

The future of our democracy depends on what happens in K-12 schools.

and tolerance is dangerously prone to anti-democratic forces.

If we lose the fight against ideological capture, our schools and public sphere will continue eroding, anti-American and antisemitic sentiment will become further normalized, and the next generation will lack the knowledge and civic habits they need to resist bigotry and authoritarianism. **But if we win — and we must** — we can restore academic achievement, literacy, and civic preparation, and rebuild the democratic norms that allow all students, including Jewish students, to thrive and participate fully in American society.

Part 2

A Comprehensive Strategy to Restore K-12 Education

Identifying the Challenge

The ideological capture of K-12 education is not primarily a pedagogical issue, but a political struggle over who shapes the next generation and whether our schools transmit American civic values or the illiberal worldview described above. The scale of the problem demands a strategy equal to its complexity and threat level. Any effective response must therefore be comprehensive, systemic, and grounded in principles that rise above partisanship.

The first requirement is clarity. American civic values — pluralism, tolerance, fairness, academic excellence, and democratic self-government — must replace the activist frameworks now rooted in many schools. These are the shared civic values, neither conservative nor progressive, that have allowed a diverse nation, including Jewish communities, to flourish.

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The second requirement is a comprehensive, cross-sector strategy. The networks advancing this ideology span teacher preparation programs, teacher unions, advocacy organizations, and, in some cases, are reinforced by foreign funding streams. No single intervention can dismantle this "ideological-industrial complex." Its durability is sustained not only by ideas, but by government funding mechanisms and political incentives. As a result, isolated or short-term efforts will fall short. Meaningful and lasting change requires coordinated action across all relevant domains. Philanthropists committed to this work must align their efforts through a shared strategic framework, ensuring that resources are deployed deliberately across the full landscape of the problem, including areas that demand sustained, long-term investment.

The third requirement is to rebuild political power at the state and local levels. Radical activists have become dominant in many of the metropolitan areas with the largest Jewish communities, such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) activists have seized control of local teacher unions, which have become platforms for electoral politics and control of school systems.[90] Under such conditions, the Jewish community's conciliatory instincts and community relations

playbook will bear little fruit. The Jewish community, and the entire civic network that sustains Jewish life, are out of power and facing forces hostile to its interests. In order to restore a sense of normalcy, not only in schools but to Jewish life more generally, the Jewish community must build new institutions and bases of political power, like the Common Ground Collective in Chicago, aimed at recruiting, funding and advancing moderate political candidates for state and local office. Such initiatives should aim not just to mobilize Jewish funds and political activism, but those of the larger business and civic community.

Strategic Action and Gap Analysis

This section outlines the strategic political, educational, investigative, and legal actions that funders and organizations should take to generate systemic change. We provide a gap-analysis to identify where meaningful work is already under way and where attention and investment are most needed.

Our analysis highlights three priority sectors where investment is most likely to yield outsized returns: (1) the teacher pipeline: schools of education, alternative pathways, and accreditation, (2) teacher unions, and (3) state level action. Together, these domains shape teacher development and accountability mechanisms that determine what reaches our classrooms.

To signal where additional investment can have greatest marginal effect, each sector is assessed using a three-point maturity scale:

1 = Undeveloped, High Priority: undeveloped field in need of investment

2 = Partially Developed: partially developed field with some investment

3 = More Developed: more developed field with current infrastructure and investment

Because K-12 education is a complex and decentralized system, progress will depend on collaboration among funders who aggregate their influence and concentrate their resources on high-leverage intervention points capable of shifting the broader system over time. The strategies described are not meant to be sequential and are likely to require experimentation and adaptation over time.

Choosing strategies will necessarily involve various tradeoffs, and not every strategy will be appropriate for every funder. Some funders may prioritize shorter-term political wins such as increased government oversight and school board elections. Others may focus on longer-term structural interventions such as reforming education schools or accreditation systems. Funders may also differ on policy. For example, some may view school choice as essential leverage, while others regard it as politically fraught or wrongheaded. These differences must not preclude collaboration across the ecosystem. Philanthropists can advance approaches that best align with their missions, capacities, and constituencies, while coordinating their efforts with those who share a commitment to solving the problems.

Addressing the problem at scale will take time and significant resources. The highest long-term returns are likely to come from upstream investments, particularly in the teacher pipeline and institutions that shape professional norms. Funders seeking shorter-term wins can support

complementary efforts that apply pressure and create the basis for longer-term change.

The challenge of generating change at scale may seem daunting. There are roughly 13,000 school districts across the United States, some deeply affected by these dynamics and others less so. At the same time, broader political and social currents are already pushing back against the ideological excesses of recent years. Our task is to help catalyze and channel them in a constructive direction.

While it may be difficult to identify a precise "tipping point" at which hostile ideological frameworks will be in full retreat, that uncertainty cannot become an excuse for inaction. We must move forward with confidence, grounded in the reality that the vast majority of Americans simply want their children to learn in hospitable, academically focused environments, free from highly politicized agendas and classroom hostility.

By coordinating philanthropic investments, building the necessary organizational capacity, widening the geographic scope of activity, choosing our spots carefully, and finding well-aligned coalition partners, we can return American education to its core mission.

Strategic Priorities: Snapshot

Level 1 — Undeveloped, High Priority Fields

- **Teacher Pipelines (Schools of Education, Alternative Pathways, and Accreditation)** that shape educator development, professional norms, and compliance conditions.
- **Teacher Unions** that exercise political, contractual, and cultural power over content, professional norms, and accountability.
- **State Action** that sets policy and standards for curricula, licensure, accreditation, oversight, and enforcement.
- **School Boards & Administrations** that operationalize policy, institutionalize ideology, and determine enforcement at the local level.
- **Coalition Building & Strategic Partnerships** that determine whether reform efforts remain siloed or achieve durable, cross-community legitimacy.

Level 2 — Partially Developed Fields

- **Curbing Radical Activist and Advocacy Organizations** that produce and distribute curricular materials and trainings, and normalize educator activism.
- **Federal Action** that shapes national attention, civil rights enforcement, investigations, and funding.
- **Parents & Educators** who provide grassroots pressure, documentation, and legitimacy for reform when organized and supported.
- **Curricula** that serve as the primary instructional vehicle through which ideology reaches students.
- **Narrative & Cultural Influence** that frames public understanding of education, extremism, and need for reform.
- **Foreign Funding & Influence** that introduces extreme anti-American political agendas into domestic education systems.

Level 3 — More Developed Fields

- **Civil Rights & Lawfare** that uses litigation and enforcement to ensure rights and deter violations.
- **Education About Jews & Israel** that builds knowledge, empathy, and resilience, and functions best when paired with systemic reform.
- **School Choice** that creates accountability through exit, competition, and pluralistic education models.

From Emphasizing Symptomatic Response to Emphasizing Systemic Strategy

Emphasizing Symptomatic Response

- Providing Jewish and Israel education
- Holding anti-bias trainings
- Reporting incidents to law enforcement
- Supporting students and teachers
- Codifying IHRA definition
- Enforcing civil rights laws
- Exposing foreign activist networks

Emphasizing Systemic Strategy

- Reforming schools of education and accreditation
- Strengthening state licensure, oversight, and education policy
- Reforming teacher unions
- Defunding foreign activist networks
- Building multi-ethnic and bipartisan coalitions
- Expanding public and private school choice
- Adopting and enforcing state and school board policies
- Winning school board elections

Strategic Priorities: Analysis

1. Schools of Education and Accreditation (Teacher Pipeline)

Schools of education remain one of the most concentrated sources of ideological activism. They introduce future teachers to social justice theories of education and activist models of the teacher's role, often reinforced through accreditation and program-approval standards that shape professional norms.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Investigate and expose** ideological programs, required courses, and school partnerships that promote activism in teaching.

- **Defund the most egregious programs** by encouraging policymakers and donors to shift funding away from programs that embed activism.

- **Reform accreditation and program approval standards** by pressuring accrediting bodies to remove ideological requirements and instead include requirements for teacher neutrality and professional ethics; use government-relations channels to influence accreditation standards (see **State Action**).

- **Support alternatives** to schools of education by expanding funding and legitimacy for alternative certification pathways that emphasize academic content, civic values, and instructional excellence; develop strategies to build non-certified educator pipelines (see **State Action**).

Gap Analysis — Level 1 (Undeveloped, High Priority)

Despite their central role in shaping our nation's educators, education schools receive little sustained scrutiny. Organizations at work in this area include **American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), Manhattan Institute, American Enterprise Institute (AEI),** and **the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE).**

2. Alternative Pathways and Professional Development (Teacher Pipeline)

Over the past two decades, the education reform movement has worked to expand the teacher pipeline through alternative pathways to certification. These efforts demanded significant political will and philanthropic investment. While some initiatives achieved modest gains, many have lost momentum over time. Several of these programs and organizations ultimately absorbed the same ideological currents that dominate schools of education, while a smaller number have managed to retain their independence.

Both alternative pathways to certification and professional development programs (required for ongoing certification and often referred to as continuing education or clock hours) can serve as a positive counterbalance to ideological education schools. That potential depends on whether state frameworks avoid embedding ideological requirements through licensure and compliance rules (see **State Action**) and ongoing monitoring.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Expose** problematic alternative pathways and state-approved professional development programs that advance ideological frameworks in teacher training.

- **Work with policymakers and philanthropists to withdraw funding, approval, or certification from programs** that advance ideological activism.

- **Incentivize high-quality alternative pathways** by supporting programs that recruit talented candidates and train future educators in high-quality teaching, including, in particular, how to teach controversial topics while maintaining neutrality.

- **Encourage universities, particularly trustees, to reform program accreditation, teacher licensure, and teacher credentialing** that require teachers to complete ideologically driven coursework or training as a condition of certification or renewal.

- **Work with select universities** and other possible accrediting bodies to start new alternative pathway programs and develop educator pipelines that recruit candidates outside traditional certification systems.

Gap Analysis — Level 1 (Undeveloped, High Priority)

This area remains underdeveloped relative to its scale and ideological influence. It is highly fragmented and shaped by differences in state licensure rules, standards, and governance. While civics-focused professional development has attracted greater philanthropic attention, comparatively less effort has been directed toward confronting the ideological influence in alternative pathways. Aligned organizations at work in this area include **Jack Miller Center, Sphere Education Initiatives, the Mill Institute,** and **Coalition for Empowered Education.** Organizations from earlier reform efforts include **Teach for America, Teach Plus, Hope Street, Educators for Excellence, TNTP (The New Teacher Project), New Leaders, Relay Graduate School,** and **Center for American Progress.**

3. Teacher Unions

Teacher unions shape district policy, professional development, curriculum decisions, teacher contracts, and political endorsements. They operate as political organizations, not merely labor organizations. Many have adopted "social justice unionism" and partnered with political groups that promote anti-American and anti-Israel narratives.

There is a long history of education reform groups and initiatives seeking to counter the political power of teacher unions, with mixed results and varying degrees of ideological alignment. While some of these groups have been ideologically captured, there are individuals and organizations within this landscape that may be allies in addressing the current challenges posed by teacher unions.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Investigate and expose** civil rights violations, breaches in ethics, inappropriate use of member dues, and political activities that deviate from the union's mission.

- **Pursue litigation to constrain unions' ideological and political power,** building on the Supreme Court's ruling in *Janus*, to challenge compelled speech, exclusive representation, and union-written employment rules that entrench ideological conformity and insulate misconduct from accountability.

- **Challenge** tax-exempt status and funding streams when feasible.

- **Support internal reform** by assisting Jewish caucuses, dissident teachers, and caucus coalitions.

- **Strengthen union alternatives** by promoting and expanding membership in organizations like the Association of American Educators and Keystone Teachers Associations.

- **Document and expose** union-produced curricula and trainings, especially those that target American history, civic values, and Israel.

Gap Analysis — Level 1 (Undeveloped, High Priority)

Given the outsized influence of teacher unions on education policy and classroom practice, this area remains very underdeveloped. The limited scale of existing work does not reflect the breadth of union influence over K-12 education. Aligned organizations working in this field include **StandWithUs-K12 Fairness, Freedom Foundation, Defense of Freedom Institute, Gevurah Fund, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Americans for Fair Treatment (AFFT), American Federation for Children, Manhattan Institute, American Enterprise Institute (AEI),** and **Cato Institute,** as well as teachers' caucuses such as **JAG (Jewish Advocacy Groups)** and **One Nation of Educators.** Other organizations challenging teacher unions include **EdChoice** and state affiliates of the **State Policy Network (SPN)**.

4. State Action

The K-12 education system is highly fragmented, encompassing more than 13,000 school districts operating within distinct state bureaucracies that can vary in governance structures and regulatory requirements. In this decentralized environment, local interventions are often insufficient. Addressing the problem requires upstream, state-level policy solutions that build upon existing laws aimed at holding educators accountable.

At the same time, not all effective interventions require statutory change. Some strategies, such as strengthening oversight and enforcing civil rights laws and transparency, can offer immediate leverage and accountability. They can also create the conditions for longer term policy and political solutions. For funders, effective coordination depends on clear prioritization and sequencing across these approaches.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Strengthen oversight, transparency, and accountability (highest near-term feasibility)**

  - Work with policymakers to exercise oversight powers, including investigations, hearings, and compliance mechanisms, and to address extremist content, curriculum providers, district partnerships.

  - Urge policymakers to strengthen state enforcement of civil rights and nondiscrimination laws, including where they exceed federal protections.

  - Press policymakers to strengthen transparency and disclosure requirements for curriculum materials, professional development providers, and vendor contracts.

  - Monitor and challenge legislative proposals that enable the introduction of ideologically driven curricula, such as ethnic studies mandates.

- **Reform teacher licensure and training requirements (moderate feasibility, high impact)**

  - Audit and press state policymakers to reform or eliminate teacher licensure rules, mandatory training requirements, and professional standards that embed ideological criteria (see **Alternative Pathways and Professional Development**).

  - Urge states to align licensure and training requirements with professional ethics, academic rigor, and viewpoint neutrality.

- **Promote policy reform and political strategy (variable feasibility, state-dependent)**

  - Identify states where new legislation is feasible, particularly in closely divided legislatures or where bipartisan or centrist coalitions can succeed.

  - Clarify governance authority over curricula and standards to determine feasibility of policy solutions such as transparency, civics education, and neutrality.

  - Connect state policymaking to federal action, recognizing that federal

investigations can catalyze state action, and state action can influence federal oversight.

- Establish and support advocacy entities (e.g., 501(c)(4)s and PACs) in environments where legislators are most responsive.

- **Engage longer-term structural reform (feasible, high leverage)**

  - Audit and use government channels to reform accreditation and program-approval systems that shape teacher pipelines (see **Schools of Education and Accreditation**)

Gap Analysis — Level 1 (Undeveloped, High Priority)

Relatively few organizations are engaged in sustained, state-level political advocacy aimed at reforming or dismantling the bureaucratic infrastructure that politicizes classrooms. Many groups operate nationally or focus on discrete issues such as general education reform, charter schools, and school choice. Without sustained political advocacy at the state level, entrenched systems will continue to reinforce ideological classrooms. Organizations at work in this area include **Israeli-American Civic Action Network (ICAN)** and **National Association of Scholars (NAS).**

5. School Boards and Administrations

School boards and district administrations set priorities, adopt curricula, and enforce civil rights protections. Reform in this area must focus on local policies, consistent enforcement, and effective leadership. However, reform efforts often underestimate how political agendas become embedded once adopted. Board members frequently use their positions to advance ideological agendas that persist beyond any single election cycle. Even when individuals depart, their agendas can remain institutionalized, frustrating subsequent reform efforts. At the same time, many states have hundreds of districts and thousands of board members, which can make impactful local engagement impractical. For these reasons, state-level policy is often a more effective lever (see **State Action**).

Compounding this challenge is the presence of partisan caucus systems that formally claim non-partisanship but operate as layered political filters in school board elections. Through opaque vetting processes and affiliated political structures that activate during contested races, these systems narrow the range of acceptable viewpoints and insulate existing priorities from challenge. As a result, reform

efforts face not only fragmented governance but also institutional mechanisms designed to limit competition and scrutiny.

The targeting of school board elections must be approached selectively and strategically, focusing on jurisdictions where credible reform leaders are already positioned to act, where local contributors and activists can sustain long-term engagement, and where sufficient civic, philanthropic, and business support exists to confer legitimacy on the candidates.

Priority should be given to contexts where success is likely to generate meaningful returns, not only locally but through increased leverage in national media, proximity to other reform states, and related strategic advantages. This disciplined approach ensures that long-term investments in school boards produce durable local wins with broader state and national impact.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Influence district leadership and win elections**

  - Map the board electoral process, including identifying open seats, filing deadlines, voter turnout, and local endorsements.

  - Press state legislatures to schedule school board elections to coincide with general elections to increase voter attention on state-level education policy.

  - Identify and train aligned candidates to run for open seats and oppose candidates advancing activist agendas.

  - Strengthen and establish new 501(c)(4) organizations and PACs to provide support for aligned candidates and challenge opponents through endorsement and funding.

- **Conduct audits of policies and practice**

  - Conduct audits of relevant board policies, ideological initiatives including "equity" offices and hiring of activist educators, and civil rights enforcement matters.

  - Use freedom of information requests to review policy enforcement, curriculum and teacher training providers, and district spending.

- **Strengthen local board advocacy**

    - Map school boards to identify friendly, neutral, and adversarial members.

    - Research and expose local suburban education caucus systems.

    - Coach parents in advocating for essential policies, eliminating ideological programs such as "equity" offices, and building local political relationships.

    - Support parents in understanding board governance and building relationships to ensure focus on academics.

    - Train new school board members in proper school governance and educational integrity.

Gap Analysis — Level 1 (Undeveloped, High Priority)

While many parents are actively engaged, advocacy is often fragmented and concentrated among Jewish parents, even though these issues require broader coalitions to achieve lasting change. Organizations at work in this area include **Leadership Institute, Education Reformers Academy, PeerK12,** and **School Boards for Academic Excellence.** Many other organizations working in this area reflect ideological influence or capture.

6. Coalition Building and Strategic Partnerships

Effective reform requires broad coalitions — spanning Jewish and non-Jewish religious and ethnic communities, policy experts, school choice advocates, and civic values organizations — working in alignment rather than independent of one another. The strength of this work depends on uniting partners around shared commitments to educational integrity, academic rigor, and pluralism. The fact that American civic values are more likely to be lauded by the political right than the political left should not render them off limits to Jewish, centrist, and left-of-center organizations fighting extremism and antisemitism in our schools.

Much of the coalition work that must be done at the state and local levels is people-to-people, not organization-to-organization. Many organizations representing ethnic communities, for example, are historically part of the broader progressive movement and are unlikely to be willing to challenge

ideological frameworks associated with the left, even if large swaths of their own communities are negatively impacted by these policies. This requires local reform activists to seek out individuals from diverse communities who share their desire for change. The Jewish community should seek alignment, not agreement on antisemitism. The very ideological actors that have created hostile classrooms for Jewish children are also undercutting important educational programs that matter deeply to other communities and academic standards that concern all parents.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Partner with individuals and organizations** committed to free inquiry and civic education and seek alliances, not only with other Jewish organizations, but with those supporting the restoration of American civic values and critical thinking in K-12 schools. Interface with Jewish groups to develop best practices.

- **Build faith-based and multi-ethnic coalitions** that unite Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Asian-American, Black, and Latino communities concerned about activist agendas that impact learning.

- **Seek bipartisan partners of the center-left** who are willing to stand up for American civic values, and engage partners on the center-right where values align, reinforcing that civic principles transcend partisan politics.

- **Conduct coalition campaigns** that amplify a unified message and drive policy and cultural change in K-12 education.

Gap Analysis — Level 1 (Undeveloped, High Priority)

While numerous organizations engage in intergroup relations work, coalition-building across political, religious, and ethnic lines toward effective education reform remains underdeveloped. There is significant need for, and potential in, cross-partisan and cross-ethnic coalitions to defend the pluralism and merit-based norms that allow diverse communities to thrive. Organizations at work in this area include the **AHA Foundation, Hindu American Foundation, Coalition for Empowered Education, Californians for Equal Rights (CFER) Foundation, American Muslim & Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council (AMMWEC), One America Movement,** and **Victims of Communism.**

7. Curbing Radical Activist and Advocacy Organizations

A network of activist and advocacy groups — including Rethinking Schools, Teaching for Change, Zinn Education Project, CAIR-linked organizations, some climate justice groups, and others — produces lesson plans, professional development, and activism toolkits that mainstream radical narratives in classrooms and beyond.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Investigate and expose** extremist materials, foreign-funded programs, and partnerships with school districts.

- **Advocate for federal lawmakers to defund** organizations that receive foreign funding and promote antisemitic or anti-American curricula (see **Federal Action**).

- **Press states and districts to increase transparency requirements** for curriculum providers and professional development vendors at the district and state levels (see **State Action**).

- **Urge states and districts to require teachers** who develop curricular materials to disclose their associations with outside organizations (see **State Action**).

- **Support programming and training** that elevate teaching multiple perspectives, civic values, pluralism, and academic rigor.

Gap Analysis — Level 2 (Partially Developed)

Several organizations have produced valuable research documenting antisemitism and ideological bias in instructional materials, but such materials continue to enter classrooms with little scrutiny or oversight. Organizations working to expose problematic materials include **Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA), Middle East Forum, IMPACT-se,** and **The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP).**

8. Federal Action

Although K-12 education is primarily a state and local responsibility, the federal government influences the educational landscape nationwide. Congress conducts investigations, strengthens civil rights protections, spurs state government responses, and galvanizes public attention. Federal agencies enforce laws, investigate discriminatory practices, and scrutinize nonprofits and unions that influence public schools. Neither the legislative nor executive branch controls curricula, teacher training, or hiring. But federal attention can shift national priorities and pressure states and districts to account for systemic failures.

Despite national attention on antisemitism and bias in higher education, federal policymakers have been far less attentive to the problem in K-12 schools. On Capitol Hill, conversations about "antisemitism in education" often default to Columbia, Harvard, or Penn. Even some staff on key committees who are attentive to the issue often lack information about the origins and transmission of ideological content that shapes what K-12 students learn.

ACTIONS NEEDED: LEGISLATIVE

- **Increase congressional focus on K-12**

  - Continue to raise awareness that K-12, not just higher ed, is driving growing extremism and antisemitism, highlighting the primary sources of teacher preparation programs and union activism.

  - Cultivate bipartisan concern and persuadable Democrats, especially moderates representing blue districts where most affected families reside.

  - Develop model legislation that curtails foreign funding to organizations that work in K-12 schools.

- **Enable investigations and oversight**

  - Build on recent congressional investigative actions, including two K-12 antisemitism hearings, to establish continuous oversight of high-risk districts, vendors, and nonprofit networks and ensure civil rights enforcement.

  - Identify high-risk districts, union actors, professional development providers,

and political networks, and supply Congress with briefings to guide subpoenas, hearings, and investigative priorities.

- Provide research and real-life testimony of parents and teachers to deepen understanding of issues and highlight the need for accountability.

- **Use federal funding as a lever**

  - Document and highlight instances of federal funding of ideological programs.

  - Advocate for conditioning federal funds on transparency and disclosure requirements related to curriculum materials, vendor contracts, and funding sources.

- **Strengthen civil rights coalitions**

  - Partner with aligned Jewish, Hindu-American, Asian-American, Black, and other multi-ethnic groups, as well as faith-based organizations that face similar discrimination, on civil rights enforcement and the opposition to activist networks in schools (see **Coalition Building and Strategic Partnerships**).

ACTIONS NEEDED: EXECUTIVE AGENCIES

- **Strengthen civil rights enforcement**

  - Urge federal agencies – Department of Education (ED), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Department of Justice (DOJ) – to investigate harassment, discriminatory curricula, and compelled political expression, and to issue clear guidance on civil rights laws enforcement.

  - Advocate for the restoration of OCR staffing and investigative capacity to address K-12 civil rights cases.

- **Leverage additional enforcement channels**

  - Encourage coordinated oversight by DOJ, Department of Labor (DOL), and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) where union-related practices create discriminatory school environments.

- Expand engagement with DOJ to strengthen K-12 civil rights enforcement, particularly where ED has new gaps in capacity.

- **Support agency action with intelligence and evidence**

  - Provide agencies with briefings on trends, research exposing problems in particular districts, and complainants that enable investigations into politicized curricula and inconsistent civil rights enforcement.

Gap Analysis — Level 2 (Partially Developed)

Federal engagement in K-12 extremism and antisemitism is uneven. While recent congressional investigations mark progress, oversight remains limited. K-12 has not received sustained attention compared to higher education. The **Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)** and **Defending Education** have done strong work in this area.

9. Parents and Educators

Parents are the indispensable force behind any successful strategy to reform school boards and district administrations. Notwithstanding the efforts of some administrators to keep them on the sidelines or even conceal lesson plans from them, parents pay property taxes or tuition, and vote. Effective board and administrative reform depends on informed, organized parents working alongside principled educators who can surface problems, press for accountability, and champion academic excellence for all students.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Support existing or build new parent networks** across schools to share information, document concerns, and coordinate advocacy efforts.

- **Equip parents with clear guidance** on academic standards and civil rights protections, and educate them on what politicized content looks like and how

it appears in curricula, lessons, communications, and programs.

- **Provide parents with practical tools** for engaging school leaders, reviewing curricula, addressing bias, and using formal school board processes to seek neutrality, transparency, fairness and accountability.

- **Support educators** who uphold neutrality, appropriately handle controversial issues, and promote academic rigor, and connect them with trusted partners when they face retaliation or pressure.

- **Empower parents to advocate** for strong academics and focus on student success as a strategy for returning schools to their core responsibilities.

- **Mobilize school-level advocacy** for initiatives that elevate literacy, increase student challenge and success, and create learning environments that center on academics and push for closing the achievement gap without lowering standards.

Gap Analysis — Level 2 (Partially Developed)

Parent and educator engagement is widespread, with parents in some geographical areas more active than others. Many local groups act effectively in moments of crisis, yet efforts remain fragmented, localized, and difficult to sustain over time. The field lacks sufficient coordination and shared infrastructure to convert grassroots concerns into institutional change. Organizations at work in this area include Jewish legacy organizations such as **Jewish Federations, Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRCs), American Jewish Committee (AJC),** and **Anti-Defamation League (ADL),** along with **EndJewHatred, StandWithUs, PeerK12, Defending Education**, and many local groups such as **Philadelphia-area Jewish Family Associations, SHIELD, JewTLA, New York City Public School Alliance,** and **South Bay Jewish Advisory Group.**

10. Curricula

Curricula are a major vector for ideological content in classrooms. In response to ethnic studies alternatives that highlight the struggles, progress, and contributions of America's ethnic groups; and others have argued that existing social studies standards already cover these themes. Countering politicized curricula requires coordinated state and local action that sets rigorous academic standards and equips schools with high quality materials that limit activist instruction (see **State Action** and **School Boards and Administrations**).

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **State Policy and Standards**

  - **Oppose ethnic studies** mandates and materials that embed political goals into instruction.

  - **Press state policymakers to enforce academic guardrails,** especially where ethnic studies is mandated, including coherent, knowledge-rich course sequences and clear distinctions between historical analysis and ideological interpretation.

  - **Audit and strengthen state history and civics standards** that emphasize primary sources, factual knowledge, and historical analysis.

  - **Urge state policymakers to set clear requirements for alignment** between curriculum standards, teacher preparation, and state-approved professional development.

  - **Analyze whether ideological curricula and programming violate Common Core standards,** which often emphasize critical thinking.

- **Curriculum Oversight**

  - **Audit and analyze current ethnic studies and other curricula, including textbooks and materials,** across social studies, English, math, science, and civics for accuracy and bias.

  - **Develop clear instructional guidance and guardrails** for existing ethnic studies mandates in order to help teachers meet statutory expectations while maintaining open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and academic rigor.

  - **Connect teachers with accurate, unbiased, and academically rigorous curricular materials** that emphasize primary sources, multiple perspectives, factual knowledge, and historical analysis.

  - **Support history and civics instruction** that emphasizes primary sources, factual knowledge, and historical analysis.

  - **Build robust teacher and parent networks** to surface problematic materials, trainings, and programs (see **Parents and Educators**).

Gap Analysis — Level 2 (Partially Developed)

Curriculum reform is an active but uneven field. While multiple organizations have produced strong research and materials – particularly in history and civics – efforts remain fragmented and have yet to be adopted at scale. Standards-based, knowledge-rich curricula exist, but they often struggle to compete with ideologically driven materials that are aggressively promoted through professional development networks and district partnerships.

Organizations at work in this area include **Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS), Amcha Initiative, Alliance for Constructive Ethnic Studies (ACES), American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Manhattan Institute, StandWithUs-K12 Fairness, EndJewHatred, Center for Civic Education, Civics Alliance, Coalition for Empowered Education, Independent Institute,** and **Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR).**

11. Narrative & Cultural Influence

To make progress in K-12 schools, we must confront the upstream ideas, norms, and narratives that shape these pedagogies. Unless we engage these cultural headwaters of power and offer a strong alternative rooted in shared civic values, reforms will continue to be overwhelmed by upstream ideological currents.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Shape storytelling** through journalism and documentary work that exposes how ideology is reshaping schools and highlights the experiences of parents, students, and educators who are willing to speak openly.

- **Partner with trusted influencers and cultural figures** who can help normalize conversations many people are hesitant to start and engage with.

- **Promote a narrative of moral courage** that empowers ordinary people to recognize what is happening in their schools and feel confident standing up for American civic values.

- **Develop a messaging framework tailored to diverse audiences,** informed by research and testing. Evidence suggests that messages centered on student learning, well-being, and academic outcomes resonate more effectively than explaining the ideological nature of the problem. Additional market research and message testing are needed to refine and scale high-impact narratives.

Gap Analysis — Level 2 (Partially Developed)

While some journalism, advocacy, and storytelling efforts have begun to challenge biased narratives, this work remains under-resourced relative to its importance. Sustained investment is required to counter upstream cultural forces that shape policy outcomes. Organizations/media outlets at work are **The Free Press, Free Beacon,** and **StopAntisemitism.**

12. Foreign Funding and Influence

Protecting schools and children from foreign influence requires districts, states, and federal agencies to establish clear, enforceable guardrails governing foreign funding. For malign actors seeking to politicize American education, foreign influence campaigns can yield disproportionate returns by aligning with teacher unions and the politicians they support. Such alignment provides access not only to publicly financed education systems, but also to union-backed resources and infrastructure. These efforts are often reinforced through partnerships with domestic actors — including radical elements within teacher unions and education consultancies — that already wield political influence and enjoy direct access to classrooms, curricula, and decision-makers.

There are precedents, however, in curtailing foreign funding. After a U.S. Senate investigation into Confucius Institutes documented foreign influence in K-12 and higher education, most of the college-level programs were shut down. An expanded approach can expose and remove foreign networks that fund K-12 curricula and training.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Press for mandatory teacher disclosure,** through legal and legislative means, of any foreign-sponsored professional development, travel, or training received outside of district channels.

- **Urge policymakers to require all K-12 school districts to implement standardized vetting** of external curriculum developers, professional development providers, and cultural-exchange programs for foreign political ties, and to mandate public disclosure of all foreign-funded partnerships, grants, curriculum materials, and sponsored teacher travel.

- **Press policymakers to prohibit school partnerships with organizations** that serve as conduits for foreign ideological influence or propaganda.

- **Strengthen investigations of foreign-funded initiatives** that target teachers directly, particularly when connected to anti-Israel messaging or extremist content.

- **Investigate and document** the links between foreign influence, teacher organizations, union activity, and support for Democratic Socialist political candidates.

- **Increase federal and state oversight and enforcement** of foreign influence laws against curriculum developers, professional development providers, and travel programs that operate at the direction or with the support of foreign governments.

Gap Analysis — Level 2 (Partially Developed)

Foreign funding and influence in education have received some scrutiny, particularly at the federal level, but sustained oversight of K-12 systems remains uneven, and transparency requirements vary widely across states and districts. Stronger coordination and enforcement are needed. The **Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI), the Program on Extremism at the George Washington University, Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), the Middle East Forum (MEF),** and **The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP**) have done important work in this area.

13. Civil Rights and Lawfare

Enforcing civil rights laws and state standards is critical for restoring accountability in K-12 schools. Strategic litigation aimed not just at punishing bad actors but creating good precedent not only protects students and teachers; it can also clarify constitutional boundaries around First Amendment rights and ensure that civil rights laws are applied equally, rather than just to those protected categories most commonly redressed in civil rights litigation. The threat of a lawsuit can be an effective deterrent. When paired with coordinated identification and referral mechanisms, litigation also becomes a force multiplier, allowing isolated incidents to inform broader enforcement and policy strategies.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Strengthen the burgeoning network of civil rights experts** who can help identify incidents and issues ripe for legal action and pursue cases on behalf of parents, teachers, and student plaintiffs.

- **Expand pro bono partnerships and funds** to expand capacity and reduce barriers for plaintiffs.

- **Educate parent and teacher communities** to know their rights and the legal tools available to them, including relevant civil rights laws and curricular standards.

- **Support parent, teacher, and student lawsuits** with research, media, and public relations.

- **Connect parents with trusted legal representation** when warranted.

Gap Analysis — Level 3 (More Developed)

Civil rights enforcement and impact litigation benefit from an existing legal infrastructure, experienced practitioners, and trusted organizations including **The Lawfare Project, Brandeis Center, StandWithUs-Law, Zachor Legal Foundation, National Jewish Advocacy Center (NJAC),** and **The Deborah Project,** as well as local **Jewish Federations** and **Jewish Community Relations Councils.**

14. Education about Jews and Israel

Investments in education programs that teach about Jewish history, identity, and antisemitism are laudable and deserve support. Research shows that current work has some impact, but is insufficient amid rising antisemitism. Education alone cannot counter the broader ideological school environments that actively shape and reinforce antisemitic and anti-American attitudes, but it can help.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Develop and strengthen current research** on which educational approaches are most likely to work.

- **Adopt approaches that go beyond Holocaust education,** which research shows has not been effective in countering antisemitism (and may actually backfire), and provide knowledge of Jewish identity, peoplehood, the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel, and contemporary antisemitism and anti-Zionism from both the left and the right.

- **Add Hebrew instruction in public schools** in order to normalize the spoken language of the state of Israel.

- **Develop programs to send school superintendents to Israel** and increase trips to Israel for state elected officials.

- **Pair educational efforts** with coalition-building, policy reform, and legal enforcement of civil rights to confront the systemic roots of antisemitism.

- **Leverage community understanding** to create sustained pressure for initiatives that support academic rigor and civics education.

- **Build alliances** with key administrators to gain support for curriculum reform, teacher training, and accountability measures.

Gap Analysis — Level 3 (More Developed)

Education about Jews and Israel is an active field with established organizations, curricula, and community investment. However, efforts are often overlapping, siloed, and insufficiently integrated into broader strategies addressing school culture and policy. Organizations at work in this area include **Jewish Federations** and **JCRCs, One8 Foundation, Institute for Curriculum Services, Boundless Israel, The Tel Institute, StandWithUs K-12 Fairness Center, Jewish Education Project, Eighteen,** and **Jerusalem Education Institute (JEI)**.

15. School Choice

When parents have a choice in where they send their children to school, they can create significant pressure for public and private institutions to improve learning outcomes and culture. School choice gives parents the "power of exit," the ability to leave when schools fail to listen or adapt, turning enrollment and funding into a form of leverage and accountability. That pressure works best when education policy offers meaningful alternatives; today, those alternatives are expanding rapidly. Twenty-nine states now have some form of private school choice, and twelve have adopted universal Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) with no income eligibility limits. ESAs allocate a portion of a student's public education funding to an individual account that families may use for approved educational expenses instead of directing the funds to a single assigned public school.

These policy shifts reflect a post-pandemic change in demand, driven largely by middle- and upper-middle-class families frustrated by COVID-era school closures, declining academic rigor, and the spread of politicized curricula. Prior to the pandemic, school choice efforts focused primarily on expanding options for low-income families; the entrance of these broader constituencies reshaped the political landscape and enabled more expansive reforms. The Jewish community, primarily in blue states, represents precisely the type of engaged, values-driven constituency that contributed to the adoption of universal ESA policies elsewhere.

At the same time, choice is not a panacea. Alternative models are subject to the same ideological pressures as district schools, and most children will continue to be educated in public systems. Whether publicly financed via ESA policy or by private household resources, technology has lowered barriers to entry, making microschools, hybrid programs, and parent-led models far more mainstream and accessible than before the pandemic. While this creates opportunity, it also introduces risk, including the potential for more isolationist or ideologically extreme models, some of which can foster antisemitism if left unchecked. Any expansion of choice programs will therefore require careful monitoring to ensure that ideological influences are kept at bay.

ACTIONS NEEDED

- **Expand broad-based support for Education Savings Accounts** (ESAs) by bringing Jewish and suburban families into a diverse coalition that understands choice as leverage and accountability, not merely access.

- **Strengthen charter school**s by protecting high performers, supporting new models, and prioritizing academic quality and responsiveness to parents over political agendas.

- **Reform the private-school sector** by challenging ideological components of accreditation, NAIS and local affiliates, and promoting transparency, governance, and parent rights so that private schools remain genuine, pluralistic alternatives.

- **Support Jewish and other religious schools** by protecting their autonomy, expanding funding pathways, and ensuring they can offer academically rigorous, values-aligned education.

- **Enable innovative alternatives** by reducing barriers and expanding access to microschools, hybrid programs, classical models, and other flexible options while developing mechanisms to vet quality and mitigate extremist capture.

Gap Analysis — Level 3 (More Developed)

School choice and alternative education are active policy areas with established organizations, legislative momentum, and public support, particularly within Republican-led states and policy agendas. At the same time, smaller cross-partisan coalitions, including groups such as Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), have supported certain choice and accountability measures. Despite this activity, efforts remain uneven and often prioritize access over institutional neutrality. National organizations at work in this area include **American Federation for Children, ExcelinEd, EdChoice, Defense of Freedom Institute, Independent Women's Network,** and **Democrats for Education Reform (DFER).**

NAVI's Role in Countering the Hostile Classroom

NAVI conducts strategic research, advocacy, government outreach, and community mobilization to strengthen accountability and educational integrity across the K-12 education ecosystem. Our work has created tangible outcomes, including the removal of extremist curricula and increased scrutiny by both federal and state authorities.

NAVI works both nationally and in key regions to:

- **Expose ideological capture** through targeted research on teacher preparation, teacher unions, advocacy networks, politicized curricula and training, and foreign-funded initiatives.

- **Catalyze government oversight and enforcement** by supporting congressional and state-level investigations with credible research and analysis, coordinating testimony from parents and educators, and identifying civil rights violations that warrant formal review, enforcement action, or strategic litigation.

- **Support and elevate reform-minded educators and parents** through grassroots engagement by providing research, education, and strategic guidance that enables effective participation in school boards, administrative processes, and policymaking.

- **Build and coordinate coalitions** across Jewish and non-Jewish organizations and individuals, as well as state and local advocacy partners, to align strategy, share intelligence, and pursue coordinated efforts consistent with American civic values.

- **Shape public understanding and build networks** through media engagement, op-eds, events, and community forums that surface and clarify how ideological extremism harms students, educators, and learning environments.

NAVI's work complements and strengthens the efforts of other organizations, and we currently collaborate with others around advocacy, policy, legal interventions, and parent-led partnerships. We view deeper coordination across these efforts as essential to achieving system-level change in education. NAVI is committed to being a central partner in a coordinated, sustained, ecosystem-wide effort to rebuild schools that prioritize learning over politics and are grounded in American civic values.

Conclusion

The problem facing K-12 education is complicated and comprehensive, and there are no easy or quick solutions. Overcoming the forces that have reshaped education will require sustained resources and coordination across research, advocacy, policy and government affairs, media, litigation, community mobilization, and coalition-building.

This is where philanthropy plays a decisive role. Philanthropic leaders are uniquely positioned to move beyond siloed grantmaking and toward peer-to-peer coordination, creating leverage that no single funder or organization can achieve alone. A top priority is convening funders who may support different strategies or operate in different regions, but who share a commitment to restoring educational integrity and liberal democratic norms. This kind of coordination generates leverage, enables significant and sustained investment to be deployed strategically, and ensures that resources reinforce one another and support a response commensurate with the scale of the problem.

Coalition-building is equally essential. The legitimacy and durability of reform depend on broad alliances that extend beyond the Jewish community, while remaining attentive to the specific harms Jewish students face. Parents, educators, civil rights advocates, faith-based communities, civic organizations, and policymakers all have roles to play. As argued in the paper, however, much of this work must be people-to-people, as many of the organizations we know best are not likely to join forces.

Coalitions, even unlikely ones, can succeed when they are anchored to a shared commitment to American civic values in schools, and when they can apply pressure to institutions that fail to uphold those commitments.

Getting started requires shared clarity about the nature of the problem, honest discussion of tradeoffs, and close coordination among organizational actors and donors where alignment exists. Initial steps include donor convenings, regional strategy sessions, and focused coalitions around specific leverage points such as education schools or state policy. Over time, these efforts must develop into a sustainable ecosystem-wide response.

The consequences of either action or inaction will be generational. Either we will rebuild a system that promotes the true purpose of education, cultivates democratic citizenship, and safeguards Jewish communities, or we will allow a system to persist that normalizes extremism and fails to educate children to uphold a free society. NAVI stands ready to chart the course with partners committed to this work.

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Appendix A | Discussion Questions

This white paper reflects NAVI's strategic analysis on the role of ideology in K-12 education. Recognizing the complexity of the problem and the limits of any single perspective, we invite discussion around whether the paper's diagnosis is persuasive and where the analysis or strategy would benefit from refinement. The following questions are meant to surface assumptions, invite debate, and prompt evaluation of the ideas explored in *When the Classroom Turns Hostile.*

1. How persuasive is the claim that the problem in K-12 education is primarily a political problem rather than educational? What informs your view?

2. Where do you see ideological influence most clearly — curriculum, teacher preparation, school board governance, union activities, institutional culture, or elsewhere? In your view, which appears most consequential?

3. What strategies are you seeing that have been effective or ineffective in practice? What are the consequences of addressing these issues as isolated incidents instead of as a systemic problem?

4. Which civic or educational principles should guide policymakers and the public in determining whether educators are crossing the line from appropriate instruction into imposing their own personal or political views?

5. To what extent does the paper assume a link between ideological frameworks and harms such as antisemitism and diminished learning outcomes, and what evidence would strengthen or complicate that claim?

6. The paper argues that it's insufficient to oppose antisemitism in K-12 education and that we must counter larger ideological forces shaping education. What tradeoffs does that framing entail?

7. The paper proposes a comprehensive ecosystem response rather than single issue fixes. Given the scale and fragmentation of the K-12 system, how should stakeholders assess the ambition, necessity, and feasibility of this approach?

8. Which proposed interventions appear most actionable in the near term, and which raise questions about timing, capacity, or risk?

9. From a strategic perspective, where do upstream investments such as in teacher preparation or union reform offer the greatest long-term leverage relative to more visible but downstream interventions?

10. What role should funders play in addressing the problems identified? What assumptions, evidence, or strategic conclusions would need to change for you to want to engage or invest?

Appendix B | Key Terms and Concepts

This appendix identifies key terms and concepts to support clarity, consistency, and accurate reference across policy, legal, and public discussions.

American civic values

Foundational principles rooted in liberal democracy, including individual rights, equal protection, free expression, pluralism, tolerance, fairness, unity amid diversity, and democratic self-government.

Ideological frameworks in K-12 education

Structured sets of assumptions and interpretive lenses that shape the teaching and learning of history, social studies, English, math, science, and civics within elementary and secondary schools.

Oppressor/oppressed framework in education

An approach that interprets individuals, institutions, and historical events primarily through fixed group power hierarchies, treating all outcomes solely as the result of systemic oppression and not individual or other causes.

Ideological capture

The process by which a coherent political worldview becomes embedded in institutional policies, professional norms, and decision-making, displacing neutrality and professionalism.

Political activism in education

The use of classrooms, school policies, or educational institutions to advance political goals or mobilize students and staff toward social or political causes beyond academic instruction.

Antisemitism in K-12 schools

Hostility, bias, or discriminatory conduct toward Jewish students, educators, communities, or the Jewish connection to Israel within K-12 educational settings, including antisemitic stereotypes, harassment, or the presentation of ideologically one-sided narratives that erase Jewish identity, apply unequal standards, or frame Israel or Jews collectively as inherently illegitimate.

Extremism in K-12 education

The promotion of political, exclusionary, or absolutist ideologies in school settings that suppress dissent, undermine pluralism, or legitimize hostility toward individuals or groups based on identity, belief, or perceived power.

Ethnic studies

A pedagogy in K-12 education that applies identity-based and oppressor/oppressed frameworks to history and social studies, often with the explicit aim of advancing social and political activism rather than academic knowledge.

Accreditation

The formal process by which teacher preparation programs are evaluated and approved by accrediting bodies based on compliance with prescribed standards. In practice, accreditation requirements shape curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, faculty training, and program priorities in schools of education.

Red–green alliance (radical progressive–Islamist coalition)

A political alignment in which radical progressive and Islamist activists collaborate in shared opposition to America, Israel, and Western liberal democratic institutions.

Knowledge-rich curriculum and academic standards

Instructional frameworks that prioritize factual content, disciplinary knowledge, and clear learning benchmarks to build cumulative understanding and academic proficiency across subjects.