



TAKING STOCK OF THE GOP SCHOOL BOARD TAKEOVER STRATEGY



The news has been **full lately** about “how Republicans are trying to use school boards and critical race theory to mobilize their voters.”

As these articles suggest, some of these **efforts** to take over school boards have been successful. But while the strategy has generated a great deal of attention, it hasn’t generated much in the way of such victories.

In a recent **commentary** in *The Hill*, journalist Jennifer Berkshire and NEPC Fellow **Jack Schneider** of the University of Massachusetts Lowell explain that “GOP candidates running on scorched-earth education platforms have fared quite poorly in school board elections.” Voters in “places like Georgia, Montana, New Hampshire and New York . . . have rejected culture warriors running for school board, often doing so by wide margins.”

Berkshire and Schneider cite a recent Ballotpedia analysis that found that school board candidates in Missouri, Oklahoma and Wisconsin were more likely to lose their races this spring if they *opposed* either (a) diversity efforts and/or instruction about gender or race; or (b) coronavirus safety measures such as masks, vaccine requirements, or distance learning. In other words, they were more likely to lose if they expressed hardline Republican stances on hot button issues.

Even in heavily Republican areas such as rural Georgia, such stances have not guaranteed victories, Berkshire and Schneider note. It’s not that these areas have suddenly turned blue, they contend. “Instead, the culture war approach is falling short because Americans have

direct experiences that contradict what they're hearing from candidates.”

These direct experiences are more likely than ever to be positive, according to the [2022 installment](#) of PDK's longstanding annual education poll. Fifty-four percent of American adults assigned grades of A or B to their local public schools this year—the highest rate since PDK started its poll in 1974. Public school parents are even more likely to be satisfied; 68 percent assigned their children's schools grades of A or B this year.

“For candidates seeking to convince parents that their kids' teachers are left-wing subversives or would-be predators, that means telling parents that they're wrong about their direct personal experiences with their local schools,” Berkshire and Schneider write.

“Sometimes,” they conclude, “fact is resistant to fiction.”

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This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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