

Talking Points for Education
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I. Preamble: How we advocate

We can't advocate for specific candidates, but we can advocate for specific principles and for/against specific legislation. We can also advocate for/against specific executive actions. If elected officials who are doing things we don't like sense that a lot of people aren't with them, they may tone down their excesses. They want to be re-elected!

The following is based on a publication from We Make the Future and on a training program from the Union of Concerned Scientists I attended last April.

<https://www.wemakethefuture.us/resources-docs/freedom-to-learn-messaging-guide>

Both agree that the most effective approach to advocacy is to build common ground, not to repeat the talking points of the other side, to call out those who have pushed the other side and its "disinformation", and to emphasize your own values. Both agree that we can't convince the hard-line believers, but we can influence those on the fence or "persuadables."

Lead with Shared Values

- For children to grow up happy and fulfilled and to be themselves—internalize their own values
- For children to receive a high-quality education
- To be honest with our children about the good and bad of our country
- For youth to be prepared for the modern workplace and for international trade
- For our children to continue to be "ours": members of our community (I believe this is a strong value, but some of us counterbalance it with the first one.)
- Higher education:
 - To have public colleges and universities that are rated highly—that we can be proud of
 - For public universities to produce outstanding graduates in all fields
 - For public universities to cultivate the success of our children and all who attend

Who caused the problem?

- Self-promoting actors, including politicians and influencers, have exploited our fears to gain recognition and election.
- What are those fears? "Cancellation"—of our culture and race. "Replacement" of us as the dominant culture in the US. "Taking away" our children—making them not part of us.

We all have a stake in public education.

- Public education is funded by all taxpayers whether we have children or not.
- One of the main reasons we have public education is to produce good citizens. Good citizens consider the good of society and not just their own welfare.

II. Talking Points

Each one of these starts with a common value.

Those of us who have children attending public schools want them to receive an education that will make them happy and fulfilled. They will be fulfilled if they are allowed to be themselves and not be molded into someone else's value system. But too many loud voices today want the schools to mold their students into their own value systems. They want to close the door to students' exposure to different ideas that might broaden their perspectives. Our children will be stronger in their own self-respect if allowed to develop their own values.

We would all like our children in Florida public schools to receive a high-quality education. A high-quality education will acquaint them with all the ideas that are prevalent in American education, including perspectives from people who are different from those they know best. Such an education will enable them to be not only good citizens of a country composed of many different kinds of people, but successful in a workplace with a variety of people. However, Florida politicians want to restrict the education of our students to certain values and ideas that they themselves hold, including the supremacy of American traditional culture. An education that is limited to only one viewpoint, that of American exceptionalism, is not a quality education because it fails to prepare students to recognize and respect other viewpoints.

Public schools in America were founded to produce good citizens and responsible adults. Whether we have children or not, we have a stake in public education for this reason. The demands of certain groups to block our students from learning about the humanity of people who are not like them will not help produce good citizens. A successful democracy requires an electorate composed of voters who think beyond their own personal needs and respect the rights and dignity of all our citizens.

It is the responsibility of public schools to teach the truth as best we understand it in this moment of history. Because of the growing voices of those previously neglected, we have come to understand that there are perspectives on our country and its legacy that our children need to be aware of. They need to be aware that not everything that has been done by those in power in the United States has been good, although much has been the best in the world. We will not continue to be the best in the world if we ignore where we have gone wrong. Those who want to ban the teaching of the worst moments in our history are pushing Florida education in the wrong direction for our students. We need our future citizens to recognize where we have gone wrong so that we can grow stronger as a nation. This is the vision of the last verse of "America the Beautiful": "America! America! God mend thine every flaw, confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law."

We can all agree that the ultimate goal of education in Florida, from elementary to higher education, is to produce adults who will be successful and fulfilled in their careers. Graduates will be entering careers with organizations that are staffed with all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. In order to be successful, these graduates need to be aware of the many kinds of cultural influences that have come to make up modern America. They will not be successful as leaders if they disrespect the cultures of their co-workers, because an effective leader motivates people rather than just commanding them. In shaping Florida educational standards to promote the primacy of Western culture, Florida elected and unelected officials are exploiting our fears of the unknown at the cost of our students' future success.

If we're honest with ourselves, we hope for our children to remain "ours": to remain as members of our particular community and culture. One of the main things we tend to fear when our children go to school is that they may be attracted to some other community that we find strange. Self-appointed and elected demagogues in Florida have exploited this fear with their new calls for education to be restricted to exclude the viewpoints of those they think we do not approve of. But a high-quality education will acquaint students with a variety of viewpoints. Please note that it is scarcely possible to teach just "facts" without any viewpoint at all. Do we have to choose between a high-quality education and the alienation of our children? No! The love we show to our children and the good values of our own culture will continue to be powerful, and if these are strong, our children will not depart from them. But with a quality, unrestricted education, they will learn to understand and respect other cultures as a citizen of a democracy should.

Higher Education

Sure, we root for our football teams. But what we really value is the reputation of our colleges and universities in Florida. This reputation comes from various sources: rating agencies, accrediting organizations, and scholarly associations. None of these are governmental: rating agencies, such as U.S. News and World Report, are commercial organizations; and accrediting organizations and scholarly associations, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the American Historical Association, are voluntary membership associations. The composite result of all these judgments equals the reputation of an institution of higher education. Associations of scholars, in particular, have produced over the centuries both useful and elevating human knowledge. This has happened not because of the enforcement of uniformity, but because of debate and the free exchange of ideas. It is true that threats to the free exchange of ideas can come from parts of the scholarly community. For example, recently a faculty member was accused of Islamophobia for showing a portrait of Mohammed. But such incidents are usually limited in scope and eventually the scholarly community will correct its excesses. Contrast this with the broad-scale intervention of Florida government in determining what may be taught and how it may be taught. Rather than affecting isolated individuals, this governmental restriction has already begun to set limits on the free exchange of ideas and academic freedom, even while it has been under court-ordered abeyance.

When we send our children to a Florida university, or when we enroll in one of these excellent institutions, we expect that it will lead to a successful and satisfying career. Besides specialized knowledge, what might lead to a successful career? In today's workplaces, much is done by teams rather than individuals. The successful person needs to actively communicate with fellow workers and to value their individuality as well as their contribution to the task at hand. This is even more important in management positions: today's management is "people management". Moreover, our largest and most successful corporations are multinational. If Florida officials, exploiting our fears of unfamiliar cultures and ways of living, force colleges and universities to teach only the superiority of "western culture", they will be handicapping graduates in their future work with people who do not come from this culture but have valuable skills. Specialized knowledge needs to be renewed on a regular basis, but the habit of respect and cooperation with those who are not members of one's own culture will not fade with time.

Despite the name, New College of Florida is a member of the State University System of Florida. The 2025 System Strategic Plan, amended November 2022, declares as the mission of the System "to provide undergraduate, graduate and professional education, research, and public service of the highest quality through a coordinated system of institutions of higher learning, each with its own mission and collectively dedicated to serving the needs of a diverse state and global society." New College already

had a mission when Governor DeSantis decided to change it to its direct opposite. It served students whose independent spirit--“freethinkers” to be specific--made it hard for them to fit into a large university. They represent part of our “diverse state”. But in Florida today, freedom is touted in all areas except thinking. The Governor teamed up with a nationally known conservative firebrand and seized on this unique institution to convert into a replica of a private religious institution in Michigan. This was not part of the strategic plan for 2025.

How we can use talking points:

LTE

Our own groups and branches—people are looking for information

Petition drive

Issue forums: Weston scheduled one on CRT

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This is another development of talking points.

As a graduate of the history department of Harvard University, Governor DeSantis must know that there is no such thing as value-free history. Much history has been written by the victors in both killing wars and culture wars. Consequently, those histories perpetuated and lauded the culture and values of the victors. If scholars wish to know about other viewpoints on what happened, they must consult sources other than the officially sanctioned histories. Sometimes even what happened has been hidden: we know that the newspaper in Jacksonville Florida failed to cover all the events of what is now known as Ax Handle Saturday. We know this because recently people cared enough to interview the people who actually were present.

Everyone who is concerned about education in Florida should be watching for the results of the recently passed laws and directives on what actually happens in the classroom, on what happens to teachers and students. If possible, attend school board meetings and speak on your own values. School boards should not be hearing only from those fearing cancellation or replacement. Write letters to local media and to local legislators. Even if those legislators are opposed to your ideas, they need to hear that not everyone supports them. Don't forget about the unelected officials.

There are outside groups who are heavily invested in scaring parents to score political points.

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