



NATIONAL JOURNAL

CONVENTION DAILY

# On education, Harris and Trump have two schools of thought

The nominees diverge widely on such topics as student-debt relief, what should be taught in classrooms, and whether there should even be an Education Department.



(AP Photo/Seth Perlman, File)

## **Anya Sesay and Melos Ambaye**

🕒 Aug. 19, 2024, 6:50 p.m.

**D**onald Trump and Kamala Harris don't agree on much. And education is a prime example of a policy area where they diverge sharply.

The Democratic Party on Sunday released the draft of its platform, which delegates approved Monday night. It champions affordable education—touting plans to lower the cost of early-childhood programs as well as higher education. Similarly, it looks to spend federal funds on strengthening public education programs. And given Harris’s legislative record, she is expected to follow through on the platform, expanding upon the current administration’s efforts to increase funding of K-12 public education and pursuing legally defensible ways to cancel student-loan debt to make higher education more affordable.

In contrast, Trump’s platform, Agenda 47, seeks to roll back many of the Biden-Harris administration’s education policies. The agenda outlines plans for school choice and patriotic curricula in K-12 education and proposes alternatives to traditional four-year colleges to increase accessibility of higher education. In addition, he’s endorsed the idea touted by conservative allies to eliminate the Education Department.

### **Public-school funding and curriculum**

Harris has championed increased funding for public K-12 schools, particularly advocating for boosting Title I funding, which aids schools with high percentages of low-income students. The Democratic National Committee platform says the party is committed to close the school-funding gap by tripling Title I funding.

“Each year, the United States spends \$23 billion more on schools in predominantly white districts than in non-white districts,” the platform reads. “Using property taxes to fund public K-12 schools results in inequitable treatment for students in low-income school districts, compared to those in wealthier areas.”

Trump’s agenda is focused on addressing concerns that K-12 curricula diverge from American values, threatening to defund schools that teach critical race theory and gender ideology.

“Republicans will ensure children are taught fundamentals like reading, history, science, and math, not leftwing propaganda,” reads the

[Republican Platform](https://rncplatform.donaldjtrump.com/?gl=1*3d1efo*_gcl_au*MjE5ODU2NzYwLjE3MjMyMzA5MTQ.&_ga=2.18777337.1120019375.1723230917-1523510152.1723230915) ([https://rncplatform.donaldjtrump.com/?gl=1\\*3d1efo\\*\\_gcl\\_au\\*MjE5ODU2NzYwLjE3MjMyMzA5MTQ.&\\_ga=2.18777337.1120019375.1723230917-1523510152.1723230915](https://rncplatform.donaldjtrump.com/?gl=1*3d1efo*_gcl_au*MjE5ODU2NzYwLjE3MjMyMzA5MTQ.&_ga=2.18777337.1120019375.1723230917-1523510152.1723230915)).

“We will defund schools that engage in inappropriate political indoctrination of our children using federal taxpayer dollars.”



DAILY

## How the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Chevron* could affect public schools and higher education

High school sports, programs for students with disabilities, and college-debt forgiveness are among the areas likely to be affected.

MELOS AMBAYE

([/s/725747](https://www.nationaljournal.com/s/725747))

Last year, Harris slammed Florida's new standards for teaching Black history in public schools, including messaging that enslaved people acquired [useful skills from slavery](https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/floridas-new-history-standard-blow-our-students-and-nation) (<https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/floridas-new-history-standard-blow-our-students-and-nation>). The new standards came after Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a law that restricted public schools from teaching students about race, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

"They want to replace history with lies," Harris [said](https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/vice-president-harris-speaks-out-against-florida-board-of-education-over-new-curriculum-189072965863) (<https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/vice-president-harris-speaks-out-against-florida-board-of-education-over-new-curriculum-189072965863>). "These extremist, so-called leaders should model what we know to be the correct and right approach if we really are invested in the well being of our children. Instead, they dare to push propaganda to our children. This is the United States of America. We're not supposed to do that."

## **School choice**

Like many Republicans, Trump supports school choice, dubbing it "the new civil rights issue of our time" in 2016. School choice allows families to use public money through vouchers to attend private schools regardless, in many cases, of income or neighborhood.

"Republicans believe families should be empowered to choose the best Education for their children," reads the GOP platform. "We support Universal School Choice in every state in America. We will expand 529

Education Savings Accounts and support homeschooling families equally.”

The issue looms large in Harris's choice of running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. One of the leading contenders to join Harris on the ticket had been Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, who supports funding public education but has made waves in the Democratic Party for his support of taxpayer-funded private-school vouchers. Walz, a former high school teacher, has opposed voucher programs throughout his gubernatorial career.

The Harris-Walz platform proposes conditional federal funding to charter schools on a district’s review to ensure that they do not systematically underserve the neediest students.

“We support measures to increase accountability for charter schools, including by requiring all charter schools to meet the same standards of transparency as traditional public schools,” reads the DNC platform.

“Democrats oppose private school vouchers and other policies that divert taxpayer-funded resources away from the public school system.”

## **Early-childhood education**

Harris has been a strong advocate for Head Start, a federally funded program offering free early education to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers from low-income families to boost school readiness.



DAILY





## Supreme Court ruling forced Biden to improvise on student debt plans. Is it working?

His efforts have yielded \$168 billion in relief for some 4.8 million Americans, compared to the \$400 billion in his original plan to help as many as 43 million.

MELOS AMBAYE

(/s/725820)

The DNC platform vows to expand Head Start and work with states to increase access to early-childhood education programs, including universal pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

“We recognize that learning starts at birth, and the exorbitant costs of safe, quality child care present a significant economic burden to families,” the platform reads. “Democrats support making child care and dependent tax credits significantly more generous and will increase funding to states to guarantee that low-income and middle class families can afford child care.”

The Republican platform does not include proposals for pre-K education. Trump does not support federally funded universal pre-K, as reflected in his [2021 budget proposal](https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/budget_fy21.pdf) ([https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/budget\\_fy21.pdf](https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/budget_fy21.pdf)), which called for the elimination of the federal Preschool Development Grant program.

## Education Department

The role of the Education Department has been hotly contested this election cycle, with Project 2025—the Heritage Foundation’s playbook for the next presidential administration—pushing to dissolve it altogether. Though Trump has worked to distance himself from Project 2025, in a recent [interview with Elon Musk on X](#)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swa8oT4G95A>), he proudly stated his plans to eliminate the agency and send the responsibility of education “back to the states.”

Federal [education funding](#) ([https://www.pgpf.org/budget-basics/how-is-k-12-education-](https://www.pgpf.org/budget-basics/how-is-k-12-education-funded#:~:text=Federal%20Funding%20Programs%20for%20K%2D12&text=Federal%20fund)

[funded#:~:text=Federal%20Funding%20Programs%20for%20K%2D12&text=Federal%20fund">funded#:~:text=Federal%20Funding%20Programs%20for%20K%2D12&text=Federal%20fund](#)  
[s%20made%20up%20%24119,during%20the%202022%20fiscal%20year.](#)) only makes up about \$1 of every \$7 spent on schools nationwide, so financially the impact would be relatively small. And states are still in charge of setting academic standards for their students despite unsuccessful federal efforts in recent years to set floors on reading and math competency for each grade level.

Harris and Democrats would like to increase funding for the department. In particular, they aim to “reinvigorate” the department’s Office of Civil Rights, amidst a post-[SFFA v. Harvard](#)

(<https://www.naacpldf.org/case-issue/sffa-v-harvard-faq/>) political climate in

which states continue to aggressively [roll back diversity, equity, and](#)



[inclusion](https://www.nbcnews.com/data-graphics/anti-dei-bills-states-republican-lawmakers-map-rcna140756) (<https://www.nbcnews.com/data-graphics/anti-dei-bills-states-republican-lawmakers-map-rcna140756>) programs. Democrats also want to allocate office funds to community strategies for desegregating public schools.

## Higher education

On the higher-education front, the Democratic platform promises to increase federal funding for a number of policy initiatives—most of which target historically underserved populations.

Harris has aligned her policy and priorities with the platform’s mission, urging tuition-free college for millions, increased student-debt forgiveness, and greater federal support for historically Black colleges and universities. As a senator, Harris cosponsored Sen. Bernie Sanders’s [College for All Act of 2017](https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/806?s=8&r=67&q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%5C%22kamala+harris%5C%22%22%7D) ([https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/806?](https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/806?s=8&r=67&q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%5C%22kamala+harris%5C%22%22%7D)

[s=8&r=67&q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%5C%22kamala+harris%5C%22%22%7D](https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/806?s=8&r=67&q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%5C%22kamala+harris%5C%22%22%7D)), which aimed to make community colleges free for all students and public two- and four-year institutions tuition-free for families with incomes below \$125,000. The measures outlined in the bill are largely reflected in the platform, with the party also advocating for pathways to free education for Dreamers, undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children by relatives.



DAILY

**Dueling Trump, Harris economic plans take shape as Dems head to convention**



Despite strong fiscal numbers recently, Trump still leads on the economy in polling.

CASEY WOOTEN

(/s/725949)

Trump, on the other hand, has criticized the higher-education system as being intrinsically flawed. He said the U.S. spends too much money on colleges and universities that are “turning our students into Communists and terrorists.” He has called for a complete revamping of the system. He wants to tax the endowments of nonprofit, private universities and use that money to fund the construction of The American Academy, which would be free to students and provide courses “covering the full spectrum of human knowledge and skills,” from ancient history to financial accounting or skilled trades. But there would be limits on political speech taught at this academy.

“It will be strictly nonpolitical, and there will be no wokeness or jihadism allowed—none of that's going to be allowed,” Trump said.

While both candidates support increased scrutiny on for-profit institutions, they differ on what that means. Trump has blasted college and university presidents for promoting cultural inclusion over academic proficiency. He has vaguely vowed to hire a new cohort of accreditors to set “real standards on colleges once again and once and for all.”

Trump has vowed not only to go after private universities for what he broadly describes as defrauding students, but he also pledged to direct the Justice Department to pursue federal civil-rights cases against schools that engage in what he calls racial discrimination “under the guise of equity.”

Harris has a history of prosecuting fraudulent institutions. While highlighting this record, she spoke of what she called Trump’s hypocrisy on this issue.

“As attorney general of California, I took on one of our country's largest for-profit colleges and put it out of business,” Harris [said in a July speech to campaign staffers](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeheX6vjf1k) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeheX6vjf1k>).

“Donald Trump ran a for-profit college, Trump University, that was forced to pay \$25 million to the students it scammed.”

On the subject of student debt, which has been one of the pillars of the Biden presidency, both the platform and Harris’s legislative record suggest she plans to continue pushing ways to increase student-loan forgiveness.

Neither Trump nor the Republican Party have proposed platform measures on student-debt relief, but the former president has criticized President Biden’s approach to forgiving billions in student loans. Project 2025 calls for the repeal of the administration's policies on this issue.

“The new Administration must end the prior Administration’s abuse of the agency’s payment pause and [Higher Education Act] loan forgiveness programs, including borrower defense to repayment, closed school discharge, and Public Service Loan Forgiveness,” [Project 2025](https://static.project2025.org/2025_MandateForLeadership_CHAPTER-11.pdf) ([https://static.project2025.org/2025\\_MandateForLeadership\\_CHAPTER-11.pdf](https://static.project2025.org/2025_MandateForLeadership_CHAPTER-11.pdf)) reads. 