

The Impact of Partisanship on Student Performance in Politically Divided States

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ABSTRACT

The growing politicization of school board governance has had a significant impact on student academic performance, classroom stability, and teacher retention in different ways across various states with different political leanings. While some states maintain nonpartisan education policies, others have seen frequent shifts in curriculum standards, funding priorities, and regulations due to ideological debates. This study employed a comparative, cross-state analysis to explore student performance across politically divided school districts, focusing on standardized test scores, graduation rates, teacher retention, and curriculum implementation in Florida, Texas, Virginia, California, and New York. These states represent different governance structures, with varying approaches to curriculum restrictions, diversity policies, and education funding. The findings indicate that states with stable, bipartisan education policies see better student outcomes, while those experiencing frequent partisan conflicts suffer from academic disruptions and increased teacher attrition. The study also includes data visualizations and policy recommendations to mitigate the negative effects of political interference in school governance.

KEYWORDS

Policy; school boards; state legislation; equity.

INTRODUCTION

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the control of schools rested in the hands of the elite citizens of the community. Originally, the “elites” who were chosen to serve on what we now refer to as “school boards” were then referred to as “Selectmen” and were appointed to their posts by other elite citizens of the community (Campbell et al., 1985, p. 5). These select citizens were responsible for overseeing virtually every aspect of the community’s schools. However, it was argued by at least one Selectman, Samuel Adams, that the elitist attitudes already dominating public school boards would persist if the seats remained as appointed positions by only the elite community members (Callahan, 1975). Adams was successful in convincing others of this potential problem and successfully lead an effort to change the process from appointment to a non-partisan election process. Hence, the birth of elected lay oversight boards of education.

Over the years, the majority of states across the US have maintained non-partisan school board elections, which means school board elections run without any formal association to any political party, and candidates’ names appear on the ballot without party labels, and school board election cycles take place separately from other major election cycles. Yet not all states select school board members this way. Alabama, Connecticut, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania are four states where the state constitution directs partisan school board elections. These state constitutions either automatically allow partisan labels on ballots for school board elections or explicitly require them (Ballotpedia, 2023). Additionally, several other states, such as Georgia, Rhode Island, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina, have laws or have amended state constitutions to explicitly allow for partisan or nonpartisan elections and leave the decision to local authorities and the flexibility to choose between the two electoral processes (Ballotpedia, 2023; Youth Today, 2023).

Other states, such as Florida, which is currently a non-partisan school board election state and is largely considered a conservative-leaning state, require a constitutional amendment to shift from non-partisan to partisan school board elections. In fact, during the 2024 elections, Florida had an amendment on the ballot to change the state constitution from non-partisan to partisan elections. However, the ballot measure was not approved. Had it been approved, the election process for school board candidates would have changed to partisan elections in 2026 (Ballotpedia, 2023; Youth Today, 2023). Similar to what is occurring in Florida, two other states currently considered conservative in their political leanings, Iowa and Ohio, have introduced bills intended to switch their school board elections from non-partisan to partisan during their next legislative session. New Hampshire, most often considered a swing state with liberal leanings yet that currently (2024) employs a Republican governor, has also introduced legislation designed to shift their state’s school board elections from non-partisan to partisan elections (Ballotpedia, 2023; The New York Times, 2023; Youth Today, 2023).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This research examines student performance in politically divided school districts, focusing on states that have undergone major education policy shifts due to partisan governance. The study

evaluates academic proficiency scores, graduation rates, teacher retention, and curriculum stability in Florida, Texas, Virginia, California, and New York. These states were selected based on their distinct political landscapes, which have resulted in significant variations in school board policies, curriculum mandates, and teacher autonomy (Ballotpedia, 2023).

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do curriculum restrictions impact student performance in history, social studies, and civics education?
2. What are the effects of teacher retention and classroom stability on overall student achievement?
3. In what ways do consistent, bipartisan education policies lead to better long-term academic outcomes compared to states with frequent ideological conflicts in school governance?

Educational Reforms in Liberal and Conservative States and their Impact on Policy

Samuel Adams warned of the potential problems brought on by having only elite members of the community represent student and community interests. He pondered whether elite citizens appointed by their elite friends could compose a school board that would adequately represent the students and the community. Two hundred years later, school districts across America still fail to yield school boards that accurately reflect the demographics of the student populations. “Unrepresentative governing bodies have long been a problem in the United States, with Blacks and women having been the most grossly underrepresented group” (Glass et al., 2000; p. 3). Zimmerman (1992) and others have studied this representation phenomenon at various levels of government, but little research has been conducted to find out if the political leanings at the state level mirror those of the student populations they represent. While it can be argued that school board policies should represent the demographics of the local community and taxpayers, it is state policies, more so than local educational policies, that have had a greater influence on local educational policies.

Beyond the issue of elected representation, the role of school boards has changed dramatically since Adams’ time, which requires further exploration. Initially, school board members were charged with complete and total oversight of the schools within their community (Callahan, 1975). Later, with the introduction of district superintendent positions, the main responsibility of school boards shifted from day-to-day management to policy formation, implementation, and evaluation (Carver, 1997, Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). Today, state agencies most often initiate policy formulation. (Glass et al., 2000). Unlike the past, today’s school board members are no longer responsible for school management, and they have also seen further erosion of local control due to states now shaping and implementing new policies and revising existing policies. When the policy-setting role of school boards is examined in the context of state co-option of policy formulation, it begs the question of how each state’s political leanings influence student performance.

School boards were originally responsible for shaping the educational experiences of students, ensuring equitable access to quality learning opportunities, and maintaining academic integrity in public schools. However, the increasing influence of partisan politics at the state level in school board elections and policy reform decisions has led to diverging educational approaches across states. While education policies were traditionally developed based on research-driven best practices, recent years have seen curriculum content, funding allocation, and student rights protections become subjects of political debate (National School Boards Association [NSBA], 2022).

Educational Reform in Liberal Leaning States: New York and California

Educational policies serve as a foundational framework for determining student success, guiding curriculum development, funding allocation, and school accountability measures. In states such as New York and California, where large, diverse student populations present unique challenges, policymakers have prioritized reforms aimed at increasing graduation rates and closing achievement gaps. Over the past two decades, both states have enacted policies emphasizing standardized testing, teacher accountability, and equitable school funding, leading to gradual improvements in graduation rates. However, persistent disparities among low-income and minority students underscore the need for further policy adjustments (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023).

New York, a liberal leaning state, has been at the forefront of education reform efforts, implementing policies designed to improve graduation rates and academic performance. One of the most significant policy shifts was the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, which aimed to create a consistent and rigorous curriculum across all public schools (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2023). The transition to Common Core initially led to lower proficiency rates in standardized testing, but over time, students demonstrated improved performance, aligning with national trends.

Another major reform in New York was the Equitable School Funding Initiative, which sought to address disparities in resource distribution among urban and rural schools. Under this initiative, additional funding was allocated to low-income districts, ensuring that students from historically underserved backgrounds had access to better educational resources (NYSED, 2023). Research suggests that schools receiving higher funding allocations experienced notable improvements in graduation rates, particularly in urban areas such as New York City (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Teacher evaluation reforms have also played a key role in New York's education policy landscape. The Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) system was introduced to assess teacher effectiveness based on student achievement, classroom observations, and professional development. While the policy was initially met with resistance, studies indicate that teacher accountability measures have contributed to increased student performance and higher graduation rates (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

As a result of these combined reforms, New York's high school graduation rate increased from approximately 76% in 2010 to 88% in 2023, reflecting the effectiveness of policy-driven interventions aimed at enhancing student outcomes (NCES, 2023). However, graduation rate disparities persist, particularly among Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students, suggesting that additional efforts are needed to ensure equal educational opportunities across all demographics.

Similar to New York, California implemented progressive educational policies aimed at improving graduation rates and reducing achievement gaps. One of the most impactful policies was the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), introduced in 2013, which significantly changed how public schools receive state funding. Under LCFF, schools with higher percentages of English language learners, low-income students, and foster youth receive additional funding, allowing for more targeted support programs (California Department of Education [CDE], 2023). Research indicates that districts benefiting from LCFF funding have seen significant increases in graduation rates, particularly among historically underserved populations (NCES, 2023).

Another key reform in California was the elimination of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in 2015. The exit exam had been a graduation requirement since 2006, but critics argued that it disproportionately affected minority and low-income students who lacked access to adequate test preparation resources. The removal of CAHSEE led to an immediate increase in graduation rates, as students who met all other requirements were no longer hindered by standardized test performance (CDE, 2023).

California has also been a leader in expanding college and career readiness programs, including dual enrolment initiatives that allow high school students to earn college credits while completing their diploma requirements. The A-G course requirements, which mandate that students complete a rigorous sequence of college-preparatory courses, have been a significant factor in improving post-secondary readiness and graduation rates (NCES, 2023). However, while these policies have benefited many students, critics argue that some underfunded districts struggle to offer A-G coursework, limiting access to college-preparatory opportunities for marginalized students (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

California's graduation rate has increased from 78% in 2010 to approximately 85% in 2023, reflecting the positive impact of funding reforms, curriculum changes, and expanded student support programs (NCES, 2023). However, like New York, racial and socioeconomic disparities remain, highlighting the need for ongoing policy efforts to close the achievement gap.

Educational Reform in Conservative Leaning States: Florida and Texas

Educational policies establish the foundation for academic achievement, student retention, and high school graduation rates. In states like Florida and Texas, where public education systems serve large and diverse populations, policymakers have enacted a variety of reforms aimed at improving graduation rates and overall student performance. Over the last two decades, both states have prioritized standardized testing, school accountability measures, and school choice

initiatives as strategies to drive academic success. Although these reforms have contributed to steady increases in graduation rates, they have also sparked debates regarding educational equity, high stakes testing, and curriculum limitations (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023).

Florida has been at the forefront of education reform efforts, implementing policies centered on school accountability, standardized testing, and school choice expansion. A major shift occurred with the A+ Plan for Education, introduced in 1999, which established a grading system for public schools based on student performance on standardized tests (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2023). Schools that received low grades faced state intervention, additional oversight, and potential restructuring, an approach designed to increase accountability and improve student achievement. While the policy contributed to higher graduation rates over time, critics argue that it overemphasized test performance rather than broader learning outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Another key reform in Florida was the expansion of school choice programs, including charter schools and private school vouchers. The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which provides funding for low-income students to attend private schools, has played a significant role in reshaping the state's public education system. Advocates argue that school choice promotes competition and improves overall school quality, while opponents claim it diverts resources from public schools, worsening disparities in education funding (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

Florida has also been a focal point for curriculum policy debates, particularly regarding restrictions on classroom discussions related to race, gender, and history. The passage of the "Stop WOKE Act" and the "Parental Rights in Education" law has influenced what can be taught in classrooms, leading to controversy over teacher autonomy and curriculum standards (FLDOE, 2023). Supporters argue that these laws enhance parental involvement in education, while critics believe they limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives and hinder their preparedness for higher education (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2023).

Despite these policy shifts, Florida has experienced an increase in graduation rates, rising from 69% in 2000 to 81% in 2023 (NCES, 2023). However, disparities remain, particularly among Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students, highlighting the need for continued investment in equitable education initiatives (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Texas has taken a similar accountability-driven approach to education reform, with a strong focus on standardized testing, charter school expansion, and curriculum regulations. The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), implemented in 2003, was designed to evaluate student proficiency in core subjects and measure school performance (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2023). In 2012, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) replaced TAKS, introducing more rigorous graduation requirements and academic benchmarks. While these assessments have contributed to steady improvements in student achievement, critics

argue that they place excessive pressure on students and educators, leading to higher dropout rates among struggling students (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

Texas has also been a leader in charter school expansion, with over 750 charter school campuses statewide (TEA, 2023). The increase in charter schools has provided families with greater educational options, but concerns have been raised about resource distribution and oversight. Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools are not held to the same financial transparency and regulatory standards, leading to questions regarding whether their success is due to actual academic improvements or selective enrolment practices (NCES, 2023).

Another significant policy change in Texas has involved curriculum restrictions and content regulations. The Texas State Board of Education has enacted policies limiting discussions on race, gender identity, and systemic inequality in school instruction. Supporters argue that these policies help prevent political bias in classrooms, while critics claim they restrict academic freedom and limit students' ability to engage in complex historical and social discussions (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Despite these challenges, Texas has seen gradual growth in its graduation rate, rising from 72% in 2000 to 79% in 2023 (NCES, 2023). However, like Florida, gaps in graduation rates persist among students from low-income and non-English-speaking backgrounds, emphasizing the need for additional reforms to address educational inequities (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

Florida and Texas have implemented major education policy reforms aimed at increasing graduation rates and student achievement. Their emphasis on standardized testing, accountability measures, and school choice initiatives has contributed to steady improvements in high school completion rates over the last two decades. However, both states continue to experience significant disparities in educational outcomes, particularly for students from historically underserved communities.

Although accountability policies have encouraged school improvement, they have also resulted in increased pressure on students and teachers, raising concerns about the long-term impact of high stakes testing. Additionally, curriculum restrictions in both states have led to debates over academic freedom and historical accuracy, with potential implications for college readiness and civic engagement.

Virginia: A Politically Divided State with Mixed Political Leanings

Virginia's education system operates within a politically mixed environment where liberal and Republican leadership influence education policies in different ways. As a result, the state has witnessed policy shifts that impact testing requirements, curriculum content, school funding allocations, and school choice options (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2023). The interplay between progressive and conservative ideologies has led to both expansive reforms aimed at increasing educational equity and restrictive measures designed to promote traditional curriculum standards and accountability (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023).

Virginia has historically relied on standardized testing as a measure of academic success and school accountability. The Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments, introduced in the late 1990s, became the foundation of Virginia's education accountability framework, ensuring that students met proficiency standards in core subjects (VDOE, 2023). Schools were graded based on student performance on these exams, and underperforming schools faced state intervention and restructuring.

Over the past decade, Virginia has witnessed significant modifications to its standardized testing policies. Under Democratic leadership, there have been efforts to reduce reliance on high stakes testing, instead incorporating alternative assessment models that focus on critical thinking and student growth. In contrast, conservative-led administrations have emphasized the importance of rigorous testing standards, arguing that standardized exams are necessary for ensuring educational accountability and tracking student progress (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

In 2017, Virginia passed a reform reducing the number of SOL tests required for graduation, shifting toward performance-based assessments such as student projects, written essays, and portfolio reviews. Supporters of this initiative argue that it provides a more comprehensive evaluation of student learning, rather than relying solely on multiple-choice testing (NCES, 2023). However, critics claim that reducing standardized testing requirements weakens accountability measures, particularly for schools in lower-income districts that struggle with academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Perhaps one of the most contentious areas of educational policy in Virginia has been curriculum regulation, particularly regarding topics related to race, gender, and history. Political shifts in the state government have led to policy reversals in how social studies, history, and civics education are taught in public schools. In 2022, Governor Glenn Youngkin issued an executive order banning critical race theory (CRT) from public schools, arguing that its removal would prevent political bias in education (Virginia General Assembly, 2023). Critics of the ban argue that it limits classroom discussions on systemic inequalities and historical accuracy, potentially impacting students' ability to engage in complex civic and historical analysis (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2023).

Conversely, previous liberal-led administrations had expanded diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in public schools, advocating for culturally responsive teaching and inclusive curriculum development. These efforts aimed to address educational disparities by ensuring students from all backgrounds were represented in learning materials (Education Policy Institute, 2023). The continuous shifts between expanding and restricting curriculum content have led to uncertainty for educators and administrators, as schools are forced to adapt to changing state mandates with each new administration.

Virginia's school funding system has long faced equity challenges, particularly in rural and low-income urban school districts. Because Virginia's funding formula relies heavily on local property taxes, wealthier districts benefit from higher per-student funding, while economically

disadvantaged areas often struggle with limited resources (NCES, 2023). Efforts to address funding disparities have been a focal point of education policy reform. In 2020, Virginia implemented the Equity in Education Act, which allocated additional funding to underfunded school districts and increased teacher support programs. This initiative contributed to higher teacher retention rates in historically underfunded schools, leading to incremental improvements in student achievement (VDOE, 2023). However, budget negotiations under subsequent Republican leadership have scaled back some funding increases, reflecting ongoing political disputes over long-term investment in public education (Virginia General Assembly, 2023).

Virginia has maintained a more cautious approach to charter school expansion compared to other Republican-led states such as Florida and Texas. While school choice advocates have pushed for increased charter school funding and private school vouchers, Virginia has implemented strict oversight measures to ensure public accountability in non-traditional education models (NCES, 2023). Governor Youngkin's administration introduced a school choice initiative in 2023, which aimed to expand charter school options and introduce tax-credit scholarships for private school tuition. Proponents of this initiative argue that it provides parents with greater educational opportunities, particularly for students in underperforming public schools. However, opponents contend that expanding charter schools and private school vouchers diverts public funds away from traditional public schools, further deepening resource disparities (Education Policy Institute, 2023). Despite efforts to expand school choice programs, Virginia's charter school enrollment remains relatively low compared to other states, as Democratic lawmakers have blocked multiple voucher expansion bills, advocating instead for greater investment in public school improvement programs (ACLU, 2023).

Virginia's education policy landscape reflects the state's deeply divided political climate, where shifts in leadership influence legislative priorities in education reform. The evolution of standardized testing policies, curriculum regulations, and funding strategies illustrates the ongoing struggle between progressive and conservative approaches to public education governance. While some reforms, such as increased funding for low-income schools and performance-based assessments, have led to gradual improvements in student achievement, inconsistent policy shifts have created challenges for educators, administrators, and students alike. Moving forward, a more stable and bipartisan approach to educational policy may be necessary to ensure that Virginia's public schools can achieve long-term success without being subject to frequent political reversals.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Publicly available data from multiple sources were analyzed to gather data to respond to the study's purpose. The selection of sites for this study was purposive and included criterion for inclusion in the study. An attempt was made to select five states with diverse characteristics but particularly their political leanings. The five states and their relative political leanings were New

York (Liberal), California (Liberal), Florida (Conservative), Virginia (Mixed) and Texas (Conservative) and were chosen to examine political leanings in comparison to percent graduation rate, student performance trends NAEP (2023), and teacher retention. Data for these comparisons came from five primary sources:

- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for math, reading, history, and civics (2023).
- State education agency reports on graduation rates and standardized test scores (2023)
- 2023 Teacher retention data from the National Education Association (NEA).
- 2023 Public records of school board policy changes, including curriculum restrictions and funding shifts.

Each state was evaluated based on student performance trends before and after major policy shifts influenced by partisan governance. However, caution must be taken that indicators such as stronger student performance, higher graduation rates, and lower teacher resignation rates are dependent on many different factors, not just state policies. Other potential contributors should be considered when reflecting upon the findings of this study.

Data Analysis and Findings

This study employed a comparative, cross-state analysis to explore the relationship between partisan governance and student academic outcomes in five politically diverse states: New York, California, Florida, Texas, and Virginia. Quantitative data were obtained from the National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP], 2023), state education agency reports, and the National Education Association ([NEA], 2023), and these were integrated with publicly available school board policy documents to identify trends in academic performance, graduation rates, and teacher retention. Descriptive statistics summarized statewide performance indicators, while cross-case comparisons examined how differences in education policy stability influenced outcomes.

Table 1.

Graduation Rates by State (2023)

State	Graduation Rate (%)	Political Leaning
New York	88%	Liberal
California	85%	Liberal
Florida	81%	Conservative
Virginia	82%	Mixed
Texas	79%	Conservative

Findings revealed that states with consistent, bipartisan education policies, such as New York and California, reported higher graduation rates (88% and 85%) and stronger performance on NAEP history and social studies assessments (280 and 275, respectively). In contrast, Florida

and Texas—where frequent curriculum restrictions and policy shifts were observed—recorded lower achievement scores (250 and 255) and higher teacher resignation rates (+15% and +12%) (NCES, 2023). The integrated analysis suggests that education policy stability, particularly regarding funding equity, curriculum continuity, and teacher workforce support, is positively associated with improved student outcomes, whereas politically driven policy disruptions tend to undermine academic performance and teacher retention.

New York and California, states with long-standing, stable education policies, report higher graduation rates compared to Florida and Texas, which have experienced frequent curriculum changes and teacher shortages. Both New York and California have seen steady increases in graduation rates over the past decade, largely due to statewide education reforms aimed at enhancing academic success. However, there are notable differences in how these states have approached educational policy when compared with conservative leaning states. New York's emphasis on teacher accountability and Common Core implementation has led to consistent improvements in academic performance, whereas California's focus on funding equity and eliminating graduation barriers has resulted in more immediate gains in graduation rates.

Despite these improvements, both states face ongoing challenges related to educational equity. In New York, students in low-income districts continue to lag behind their affluent peers, while in California, the disparities in access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses limit opportunities for students in underfunded schools (NCES, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires continued investment in targeted intervention programs and policies that ensure all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, receive equal access to quality education.

Educational policy reforms in New York and California have played a significant role in increasing graduation rates and improving student outcomes. Both states have implemented policies that address funding disparities, curriculum development, and teacher accountability, leading to measurable gains in high school completion rates. However, racial and socioeconomic inequities persist, emphasizing the need for further policy interventions that promote long-term educational equity. Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term effects of these reforms, particularly in how they influence college enrollment, workforce readiness, and economic mobility for historically disadvantaged students.

Florida and Texas have prioritized accountability-driven education policies to improve high school graduation rates. Over the past two decades, both states have introduced testing mandates, school grading systems, and alternative diploma pathways to ensure higher student completion rates (NCES, 2023).

In Florida, the A+ Plan for Education, first introduced in 1999 and continually revised, established a school grading system based on standardized test performance (FLDOE, 2023). Schools that received low grades were subject to intervention and potential restructuring, while students were required to pass Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) exams to qualify for graduation. These reforms led to steady increases in graduation rates, rising from 69% in 2000

to 81% in 2023 (NCES, 2023). However, critics argue that teaching to the test and limiting curriculum flexibility have negatively impacted overall learning experiences (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

Similarly, Texas has relied on high stakes standardized testing as a graduation requirement. The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in 2012, introducing tougher academic benchmarks for graduation (TEA, 2023). Although graduation rates in Texas have increased from 72% in 2000 to 79% in 2023, concerns persist regarding disparities among economically disadvantaged and English language learner (ELL) students (NCES, 2023).

While both states have seen graduation rates improve, policy analysts question whether these reforms have genuinely enhanced educational outcomes or if they have merely created pathways for students to graduate without ensuring true college and career readiness (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Table 2.

History and Social Studies Scores and Political Leaning (NAEP 2023, 0-500 Scale)

State	History and Social Studies Scores NAEP (2023)	Political Leaning
New York	280	Liberal
California	275	Liberal
Virginia	260	Mixed
Texas	255	Conservative
Florida	250	Conservative

New York and California, two of the largest public school systems in the United States, have historically led the way in education policy reform, implementing policies aimed at improving equity, access, and student achievement (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). While both states have prioritized expanding educational opportunities, increasing funding for low-income districts, and supporting teacher workforce development, recent assessments indicate that these policies have not always translated into higher student proficiency on national standardized exams or improved teacher retention rates.

The 2023 NAEP results reveal that students in New York and California face ongoing challenges in meeting national academic benchmarks, despite policy-driven efforts to enhance literacy, STEM education, and curriculum flexibility (NCES, 2023). However, as seen in Table 2, students in California and New York outperformed students in the conservative states of Florida and Texas and the mixed state of Virginia on History and Social Studies on the 2022/2023 NAEP exam. Overall, New York students scored slightly above the national average in reading and science, while math scores remained aligned with national performance levels (NCES, 2023).

This performance can be attributed to state-led initiatives focused on literacy development and STEM education, such as the Excelsior Scholarship Program and increased funding for STEM curriculum expansion (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2023). However, persistent achievement gaps remain, particularly among low-income students and English language learners.

California students performed close to the national average, with lower scores in science compared to New York (NCES, 2023). The state has implemented policies such as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which aims to increase resources for underserved school districts, but student proficiency levels remain inconsistent across demographic groups (California Department of Education [CDE], 2023). While California has made progress in improving access to educational resources, the state’s reading and science scores suggest that additional investments in curriculum enhancement may be necessary to achieve greater gains in student proficiency.

History and social studies scores are lowest in Florida and Texas, where curriculum restrictions on race, gender, and systemic inequality discussions have led to limited exposure to diverse perspectives in civic education. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often referred to as the Nation’s Report Card, provides a standardized measure of student proficiency in math, reading, and other core subjects. Florida and Texas, despite improvements in graduation rates, have faced challenges in maintaining high levels of student achievement on the NAEP (NCES, 2023).

Table 3.
Teacher Resignation Rates (2022-2023)

State	Teacher Resignation Rates (%)	Political Leaning
New York	+2%	Liberal
California	+3%	Liberal
Florida	+15%	Conservative
Virginia	+10%	Mixed
Texas	+12%%	Conservative

Florida’s and Texas’ scores fall below or near the national average, raising concerns that increased graduation rates do not necessarily translate to stronger student proficiency (NCES, 2023). In addition to Social Studies and History scores on the NAEP, Florida has seen a decline in reading and math scores, coinciding with policy reforms that restrict curriculum content on race, gender, and history, potentially limiting students' exposure to critical reading and analytical skills (ACLU, 2023). Similarly, Texas’ focus on standardized testing and curriculum restrictions has led to gaps in knowledge retention, particularly in social sciences and advanced math courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). These results suggest that while Florida

and Texas have succeeded in pushing more students toward graduation, their policies may not be adequately preparing students for college or the workforce.

The highest teacher resignation rates were recorded in Florida (+15%), Texas (+12%), and Virginia (+10%), while California (+3%) and New York (+2%) maintained stable retention levels.

As shown in Table 3, teacher retention remains a critical issue in both New York and California, despite significant policy efforts to increase salaries, expand professional development programs, and strengthen union protections. Although these measures have helped to reduce turnover rates in some districts, many educators continue to leave the profession due to high workloads, administrative pressures, and economic challenges (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

One of the most pressing issues in Florida and Texas' education systems is the high rate of teacher resignations and burnout. The implementation of test-driven accountability measures, curriculum restrictions, and salary stagnation has contributed to growing dissatisfaction among educators (Education Policy Institute, 2023). In Florida, the introduction of strict classroom content regulations and limits on teacher discussions of social issues has led to an increase in teacher turnover, particularly among social studies, English, and history instructors (FLDOE, 2023). Texas has faced similar challenges, as stringent testing requirements and underfunded public schools have resulted in teacher shortages, particularly in rural districts (TEA, 2023). Teacher resignation rates in Florida and Texas exceed the national average, indicating growing dissatisfaction within the educator workforce (NCES, 2023). Policymakers in both states have attempted to address retention issues by introducing teacher incentive programs, yet low wages, classroom restrictions, and excessive administrative demands continue to push educators out of the profession (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Education policy reforms in Florida and Texas have led to measurable increases in high school graduation rates, yet their impact on student achievement and teacher retention presents significant challenges. The focus on standardized testing and accountability measures has improved state-reported graduation outcomes, but student proficiency on national assessments suggests that many graduates are not fully prepared for post-secondary success. Furthermore, the high rate of teacher resignations in both states reflects dissatisfaction with policy-driven limitations on classroom instruction and professional autonomy. Addressing these concerns will require policy adjustments that prioritize student learning, teacher well-being, and comprehensive academic preparation rather than simply increasing graduation statistics. Future research should examine the long-term effects of current policies on workforce readiness, higher education enrollment, and economic mobility among graduates.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study highlight the significant influence of education policy stability on student achievement, graduation rates, and teacher retention across politically divided states. Consistent with previous research, states maintaining long-term, bipartisan policies, such as

New York and California, reported higher graduation rates, stronger performance on NAEP assessments, and lower teacher resignation rates compared to states with frequent policy reversals (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). These findings support earlier studies demonstrating that policy continuity fosters more stable learning environments, enabling schools to implement consistent instructional practices and sustain academic growth (Glass et al., 2000; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000).

Conversely, Florida and Texas exhibited lower proficiency scores, higher teacher attrition, and more limited academic gains, aligning with research linking politically driven reforms, such as restrictive curriculum policies and high stakes testing mandates, to increased educator turnover and reduced classroom autonomy (Education Policy Institute, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). These findings expand upon Zimmerman's (1992) and Callahan's (1975) earlier warnings about the risks of politicizing school governance, demonstrating that frequent ideological shifts can destabilize instructional environments and weaken long-term academic progress.

This study also adds to ongoing discussions about educational equity. While New York and California reported higher graduation rates, persistent gaps remain for low-income, minority, and English language learner populations (NCES, 2023; California Department of Education [CDE], 2023). Similarly, consistent with findings from the National School Boards Association (2022), politically driven curriculum restrictions in states such as Florida and Texas may exacerbate inequities by narrowing student access to diverse perspectives and limiting civic learning opportunities.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the broader literature suggesting that bipartisan collaboration and evidence-based reforms are critical to improving student outcomes and sustaining a stable educator workforce (Carver, 1997; NSBA, 2022). The study underscores the need for research-driven policy decisions and reduced ideological volatility in governance. Future investigations should explore the long-term impacts of policy instability on college readiness, workforce participation, and civic engagement, as well as examine intervention strategies that promote equitable access to high-quality education.

This study demonstrates that student outcomes are significantly influenced by the stability or volatility of education policies in politically divided states. However, it is important to point out educational indicators such as stronger student performance, higher graduation rates, and lower teacher resignation rates are dependent on many different factors, not just state policies. Other potential contributors should be considered when reflecting upon the findings of this study. States with consistent, bipartisan education governance, such as New York and California, show stronger student performance, higher graduation rates, and lower teacher resignation rates. In contrast, states experiencing frequent curriculum restrictions, ideological conflicts, and school funding shifts, such as Florida and Texas, face greater disruptions to student learning and teacher retention.

To improve student success and reduce the impact of political instability in education governance, policymakers should prioritize data-driven, research-based education policies rather than frequent ideological shifts that disrupt academic continuity. The proposed policy recommendations, including independent education review boards, bipartisan governance efforts, and curriculum oversight committees, provide a framework for stabilizing education policies and prioritizing student success over political agendas.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed to mitigate the negative effects of partisan school board governance on student outcomes:

1. Establish Independent Education Review Boards

State governments should create independent education review boards to oversee curriculum decisions and funding allocations. These boards should be composed of educators, academic experts, and nonpartisan policymakers who can evaluate education policies based on research rather than political agendas.

2. Ensure Bipartisan Cooperation in School Governance

States should promote bipartisan collaboration in school board elections and policymaking to reduce frequent curriculum overhauls that disrupt student learning. Policy consistency leads to better long-term educational outcomes, as evidenced in states like New York and California, which have maintained stable graduation rates and student performance despite political shifts.

3. Invest in Teacher Retention Strategies

Teacher turnover is a major factor affecting student learning continuity. To address this issue, states should invest in teacher professional development programs, increase salaries to reflect inflation, and protect educators from political retaliation related to classroom discussions. Florida and Texas, where teacher resignations are highest, could benefit from stronger workforce retention incentives.

4. Implement Curriculum Oversight Committees

States should develop curriculum oversight committees that review proposed textbook bans, curriculum restrictions, and classroom discussion limitations. These committees should ensure that curriculum adjustments are based on pedagogical research rather than ideological influence, protecting academic freedom and student exposure to diverse perspectives.

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