

FEDERAL Q&A

Ending 'Government-Run Monopoly' on Schools Is Top Priority for Rep. Virginia Foxx

By [Libby Stanford](#) — February 14, 2023 ⌚ 5 min read

House Education and Workforce Committee Chair Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., greets then-Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar at the conclusion of a House Education and Workforce Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington in June 2018. Foxx spoke to Education Week about her priorities as she becomes chair of the committee for a second time.

— Carolyn Kaster/AP

Republican lawmakers—taking a move from the playbooks of GOP governors and state legislators—have made parental rights in education a top priority after assuming control of the U.S. House, and no member of Congress is championing the issue more than Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C.

In an interview with Education Week, Foxx, who is the new chair of the House's Education and the Workforce Committee, said a national parents' bill of rights and a school choice bill are at the top of her agenda. Though the research is mixed on whether school choice laws actually help improve student achievement, Foxx has thrown her support behind "education freedom," arguing more choice for parents leads to better outcomes for students.

"We've had a government-run monopoly on education for a long time, but it's outdated," Foxx said. "It's failed students."

Foxx has been on the education and workforce committee since she was elected to Congress nearly 20 years ago, and this is her second time serving as its chair. She's replacing Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., who was chair during the last Congress and focused on issues such as raising teacher pay, expanding access to free meals, and extending learning time for students struggling with learning loss following the pandemic.

Foxx plans to take a dramatic turn from the Democrat's agenda by supporting school choice policies that send public funds to private schools and bills that give parents the right to oppose school curricula, books, and other educational materials that don't align with their values.

Those policies will be hard to pass in a Democrat-controlled U.S. Senate with Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., at the helm of the chamber's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. But Foxx is optimistic.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What are your top priorities when it comes to K-12 education?

My top issue is education freedom. Education freedom is just crucial to our country. We've had a government-run monopoly on education for a long time, but it's outdated. It has failed students. And students deserve the opportunity to learn in the environment that works best for them.

A second high-level priority is protecting parental rights. We believe that parents deserve transparency and accountability, unlike the way the Biden administration treated parents—they are not domestic terrorists. They have a right to have a say in their children's education. We're going to do everything we can to restore those rights.

(The Biden administration never referred to parents as “domestic terrorists,” but the National School Boards Association said in a 2021 letter to the president that threats against school officials “could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism and hate crimes.” The group sought a federal review into whether such threats violated domestic terrorism statutes.)

A third priority, particularly as it pertains to K-12, is the devastating learning loss that has occurred, which is affecting an entire generation.

Can you talk more about the parents’ bill of rights? What would that look like?

I think that one of the first bills that will come out of the committee will be the parents’ bill of rights. It has five key rights. Parents have a right to know what their children are being taught. They have a right to be heard by educators and policymakers. They have a right to see school budgeting and spending. They have a right to protect their children’s privacy, and they have the right to keep their children safe.

Those will be in the bill that we will introduce probably early in March.

How do you see the parents’ bill of rights supporting students academically as they’re trying to recover from the pandemic? How are parents’ rights and student achievement connected?

Immediately, they are not connected. We’ll be looking at learning loss through another lens. But had we had the parents’ bill of rights in effect before COVID, then I think we could have sort of offset some of that learning loss that has occurred.

As I’ve often said, the best thing that came out of COVID is the exposure of what was happening in the schools. It has opened the eyes of parents and others to how bad our school systems are and the need for us to make these reforms that we’re going to be making.

Earlier, you said education freedom, otherwise known as school choice, is your top priority. What do you see as the value of school choice bills, and how do you think they will help support students and parents?

Education right now in this country is primarily a monopoly controlled by the teachers’ unions. Where you see parents having the freedom to put their children in either public charter schools, or there’s funding for private schools that’s provided both by government encouragement or by

other means through scholarships, then you see that students who opt out of the monopoly schools do much better.

We want to see students and parents have that choice. Because we don't want to see students, no matter what economic status they are, be controlled by the government.

(Research findings on school choice policies' impact on student performance are mixed, with some studies showing that more competition leads to increased student achievement and others stating that more options don't have any effect on student achievement and broaden inequality.)

What would you say to critics of school choice policies who say they ultimately harm public schools?

Well, what are public schools? They're funded by the taxpayers.

Parents pay their taxes. If they feel that schools are no good, and many of them are no good, the parents should be able to take the money that's being given by the taxpayers with them to schools that are going to provide [their children] with a good education.

Right now, they're not getting a good education in many public schools. When you talk about the money that's going to the schools, it's coming from taxpayers. They ought to have some say-so over how their money is being spent.

You've also mentioned student achievement as a top priority for you. What can Congress do to help students recover from learning lost during the pandemic?

We'll be doing a lot of oversight in that area. We'll be asking, how was the [COVID relief] money spent that was given to the schools to offset the learning loss?

We need to know how that money was spent because it was being given to the schools to try to mitigate learning loss. It was not given to them to fritter away as many of them did.

Many schools are feeling the impact of staffing shortages, and educators are worried not enough people are going into the profession. What can Congress do to strengthen the teaching profession?

We definitely need teachers, but what you need to know is, I don't always look for a federal solution. I'm always constantly looking to the states because that's what federalism is all about. We have the United States. The word "education" is nowhere in the U.S. Constitution for us to be dealing with. We're dealing with it. Sometimes not very well. I'm always looking for how the states are doing this and sharing that information.



Libby Stanford

Reporter, Education Week

Libby Stanford is a reporter for Education Week.

Reprints, Photocopies and Licensing of Content

All content on Education Week's websites is protected by copyright. No part of this publication shall be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic or otherwise, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Readers may make up to 5 print copies of this publication at no cost for personal, non-commercial use, provided that each includes a full citation of the source. For additional print copies, or for permission for other uses of the content, visit www.edweek.org/help/reprints-photocopies-and-licensing-of-content or email reprints@educationweek.org and include information on how you would like to use the content. Want to seamlessly share more EdWeek content with your colleagues? Contact us today at pages.edweek.org/ew-for-districts-learn-more.html to learn about how group online subscriptions can complement professional learning in your district or organization.



Copyright © 2023 by Editorial Projects in Education, Inc. All rights reserved.