APSA | Education Politics and Policy

The Organized Section in Education Politics and Policy of the American Political Science Association

Newsletter

Volume V Issue 1, Spring 2025

Contents

From the President

Dear Colleagues,

Some of our members are directly affected by the Trump administration's actions on higher education, from the fight against diversity, equity, and inclusion programs to layoffs at the Department of Education and threats to shutter the agency. These challenges underscore the vital importance of our section's work: producing rigorous empirical and theoretical research on the political causes and consequences of education policy in the United States and around the world.

Our Winter Virtual Conference (Feb 26-27, 2025) was our largest and most globally diverse yet, featuring 25 presenters, seven chairs, and participants across 13 time zones. Highlights included two keynote events: The Shifting Politics of School Choice (a conversation with Jeffrey Henig) and Shaping Minds, Shaping Nations: Democracy, Protest, and State Power – a roundtable on civic education featuring Agustina S. Paglayan (*Raised to Obey*), Domingo Morel (*Developing Scholars*), and Matthew Nelsen (*The Color of Civics*). Congratulations to Zhamilya, Sam, and Jeff, winners of our book giveaway!

The conference showcased cutting-edge research on education politics and policy, including school choice, student socialization, free speech in higher education, and the global education agenda. We were thrilled to welcome both members and non-members, free of charge, and hope many will join our vibrant section.

Looking ahead, our APSA program in Vancouver (Sept 11-14, 2025) will feature panels on education and equality, democratization and authoritarianism, human rights, ideological diversity, civic spaces, and policy feedback. Please join us for these timely discussions, our business meeting (tentatively scheduled for lunchtime on Sept 13), and our section reception at 4pm that day. Members will receive email updates with details. At the business meeting we will elect a new President-Elect and Treasurer for 2025-6. All are warmly welcome.

Many thanks to our newsletter contributors and our entire Education Politics committee – Jane Gingrich, Vladimir Kogan, Lesley Lavery, and Jason Giersch – for making this section run smoothly. Special thanks to Jason for his extended service, and a warm welcome to his successor, Karin Kitchens! If you'd like to contribute to future issues or get more involved in the section, please reach out to Karin (karin@vt.edu) or me (ursula.hackett@rhul.ac.uk). We would be glad to hear from you.

Warm regards,
Ursula Hackett
Reader in Politics, Royal Holloway, University of London
President, APSA Education Politics and Policy Section

Essay

By Jyl Josephson & Erica Fugger
American Studies, Rutgers University

Teaching students to conduct oral histories in the community engaged classroom

Political scientists have been developing a wide range of community engaged pedagogies to enhance student learning and involvement. Building upon these pedagogies, our community organizing class on Democracy and Citizenship has been taught in conjunction with a broad-based community organization, New Jersey Together, since 2016. The pedagogy is shaped around this partnership, teaching how the organization works by introducing students to leaders and organizers, and engaging them with community-based projects. The philosophy is "outside in" pedagogy: the purposes and goals of the organization drive the work of the class (Cantor 2023).

Leaders and organizers serve as guest speakers, teaching organizing practices as well as specific issue campaigns and strategies. Students attend at least one meeting of the organization and undertake a group action project, developing relationships with members and engaging in work that furthers a specific current issue campaign of the organization.

In 2022 we developed an oral history project as a new way of forging connections between organizational leaders and our students. We were inspired by an oral history initiative developed by a sister group, Together Baton Rouge. We met one of the leaders who worked on this project, Phillip Norman, and brought him as a guest speaker to one of the class sessions. We were also inspired by having an experienced oral historian, co-author Erica Fugger, serve as teaching assistant for the class, providing technical expertise and envisioning ways that the project could be meaningful and sustainable.

The oral history project is intended to collaboratively serve our partner organization in several ways. The project is a way to recognize and document the work done by the organization through its leaders. In community organizing, it is often difficult to document the work, as the point is to actively create change, not necessarily to document and evaluate how it occurs. Leaders focused on different issues may not know the details of what is happening with other campaigns. They may also not remember details after the goal is achieved, as they move on to the next issue campaign.

We found it helpful to conduct the interviews focusing on recent campaigns or to find ways to spark our narrators' memory of issue campaigns by conducting research prior to the interview. This was facilitated by our students reading news coverage of the campaigns, using the information to shape the questions they asked.

We introduced the oral history project in fall 2022 and continued it in the fall 2023 course. We set up the interviews remotely over Zoom, so that they could be conducted during the class time. We divided the class into groups of three to four students, with each group assigned one narrator to interview over two possible class sessions. While each student participated in generating and asking questions, they also had the opportunity to choose an interview role, which included being responsible for hosting the

Zoom call, setting up a backup recording on their phone, or taking notes. Between the two classes, we collected 25 oral histories with leaders from our partner organization.

For their final projects, each student chose a three-minute or less segment of the interview that related to a theme from the course, and wrote a reflection about why they chose that segment and what the excerpt illustrated regarding the narrator and the interview. We created a pilot, private Google Site to collate these interview excerpts. One instructor worked with the students to download the digital files from Zoom and uploaded them to Google Drive for archiving. Then, as students listened back to the interviews to choose the stories they sought to highlight for their final projects, the instructor edited the interview audio through Audacity and uploaded the excerpts to the Google Site. In our final class session, each group presented one interview excerpt from their page on the Google Site and the oral history narrators were invited to attend to hear the impact of their stories on our students.

A key benefit of partnering with a community organization on a long-term basis is the relationships that key leaders and organizers develop with students. The oral history project provided a way for students to get to know their narrator and thus learn more about both the work of the organization and the possibilities for leadership in local communities. The oral history project provides another way for students to learn but also to reflect upon their own present and future forms of political engagement. Learning more about a leader's life story and organizing within New Jersey Together provided another way for students to imagine their own engagement in civic life.

Oral history interviews as non-disposable objects

In a recent *Political Science Educator*, editor Matt Evans interviewed Jamie Witman about open pedagogy and the creation of "non-disposable objects" as one aspect of this work (Evans and Witman 2024). The idea is for student projects to be available to the public, to future students in the course, and/or to specific communities addressed in the course. While the genealogy of oral history is different from open pedagogy, we believe that oral history projects are a way to create such non-disposable objects that can be useful for pedagogy and communities, including partner community organizations.

The oral history project is one way to address our goal of being useful to the organization (Cantor 2023), while also developing materials that are useful to students, to the public, and to researchers. We believe that oral histories can also be useful for qualitative social science research, and at the same time provide additional benefits for community-engaged research and teaching.

Social scientists more frequently use qualitative interviews, but in standard research practice, the substance of the interview cannot be made available to the organization or to the broader public. By contrast, oral history interviews are generally conducted with the idea of public accessibility as a specific part of the process. Narrators are identified and their stories are recorded, transcribed, and often archived in public libraries. For this project, we are working with a community archiving initiative called RUCore within our university library system to preserve the full-length interview materials and make them publicly accessible. This will make this project more useful to both researchers and the organization over a longer time frame by providing publicly available "non-disposable objects."

Our intention is also that such data could also be used for research reports and other types of writing that might be useful to the organization. Oral histories can be transcribed for analysis, or, given that they are generally audio and/or video recorded, newer methods for coding and analyzing directly from the recordings can also be used (Josephson forthcoming; Saldana 2009).

As with any interview, the material in an oral history might be used in different ways for different purposes. For example, in our pilot project, there are multiple leaders who have worked together on issue campaigns, such as on housing or education. We can imagine using excerpts from interviews where a specific campaign is mentioned to document how the campaign was developed and what the outcomes were. In turn, these different campaigns can be analyzed for similarities as well as differences in the elements that made the campaign successful or unsuccessful, allowing the organization to form new insights and reevaluate strategies going forward.

Conclusion

Oral history can be seen as a low-stakes tool that is easily taught and widely accessible. In the case of our pilot project, it was used for community leaders to share their personal stories, their involvement in the organization, reflections on successful campaigns and organizing strategies, and how they suggest young people or other community members get involved in civic action. Comparing oral history to familiar organizing strategies (i.e., public autobiography or relational/house/issue meetings) also makes the process more familiar and less intimidating for leaders and organizers.

As noted above, the oral histories we are collecting also provide public documentation of the work of our partner organization. This will be useful for present as well as future research on the work of the organization.

With the oral histories we are collecting, we will document this community-engaged work and make these stories available to the public, to researchers, and to the organization. The organization might use these gathered materials both to document their work and to seek coalition with other groups, as well as to pursue funding as they continue to work on campaigns like those related to criminal justice. And we hope our political science students will continue to learn from the stories they hear and techniques they are taught through their introduction to both oral history and community organizing. We see many possibilities both for our students, as well as for the organization and researchers, in this project.

Works cited:

Cantor, Nancy. 2023. “Taking an Outside-in Perspective on a Forward Looking Academy,” American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Paper #80.

Evans, Matt and Jamie Witman. 2024. “Q & A: Open Pedagogy: Charting the Potential to Co-Create Non-Disposable Objects with Students in your Classes,” *Political Science Educator*, Winter 2024, pp. 71-78.

Josephson, Jyl. Forthcoming. “Teaching LGBTQ Politics in and of Newark,” in *Teaching LGBTQ Politics*, edited by Edward Kammerer, R.G. Cravens, and Erin Mayo-Adams, SUNY Press.

Rocco, Philip. 2021. “Keeping Score: The Congressional Budget Office and the Politics of Institutional Durability,” *Polity* 53:4, 691–717.

Saldana, Johnny. 2009. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage Publications.

Jyl Josephson’s website is https://sasn.rutgers.edu/jyl-josephson
Erica Fugger’s website is https://www.ericafugger.com/

By Michael Hartney

Essay

Why voters rejected vouchers in 2024—again!

Over the last several years, private school choice has expanded in several Republican-controlled state legislatures. Yet during the most recent election cycle (2024), voucher supporters faced a string of unexpected defeats in red states. Notably, voters in Kentucky and Nebraska—states that strongly favored Donald Trump's election—overwhelmingly rejected voucher proposals even as the GOP campaigned for them. In Colorado, which had already embraced public school choice for decades, a similar measure also failed to secure majority support from voters there.

This trio of defeats come at a time when education politics is, as is well known by readers of this newsletter, in a state of flux. In recent decades, education reformers in the US have pursued various reform strategies—ranging from standardized test–based accountability to public charter schooling. Private school vouchers sometimes entered this policy mix as a means for students in underperforming urban districts to escape failing schools. Recently, however, advocates have pressed for more universal choice programs. And, despite enthusiasm from many elites in the reform community, 2024 signals that many voters remain unconvinced.

Interestingly, voter skepticism toward vouchers at the ballot box has a long history going back to the 1970s! In a recent paper in *Education Next*, my co-authors examined that history in detail. We found remarkable consistency in the degree to which rank-and-file voters, irrespective of the politics of their state, pushed the brakes on vouchers.

Over a period of four decades, we found that every statewide ballot measure designed to expand private-school choice failed by about the same margin—whether the measure proposed universal or targeted programs, or even attempted to protect laws already on the books. Notably, this stands in stark contrast to polling data, which has long shown narrow majorities in favor of choice. Readers interested in the details of how each choice measure we looked at fared at the ballot box back to the first attempt to use initiative campaigns to expand choice in the 1970s can find more information here.

But what happened in 2024 and if the results mirror past failures, what more can we learn from studying voter responses to choice measures today? First, opponents of the trio of 2024 proposals argued that vouchers undermine public education funding, often drawing from examples of cost overruns in other states. Campaign advertisements in Kentucky, for instance, emphasized that rural districts already struggle with limited resources. Critics warned that siphoning taxpayer dollars to private schools jeopardizes local public-school budgets, particularly in communities with fewer alternatives. In flood-ravaged parts of eastern Kentucky, such messages may have resonated with voters who credited local public schools for providing shelter and assistance during crises.

Second, state-level political leaders also played a significant role. In Kentucky, the sitting governor cautioned that universal vouchers would divert revenue away from rural schools and criticized private schools for lacking sufficient oversight. The measure was defeated by a notable margin, suggesting that many Republican voters also harbored reservations about weakening public education systems in their communities.

To understand the micro foundations of voters' support/opposition to vouchers, my co-authors (Vlad Kogan, Parker Baxter) and I analyzed precinct-level voting patterns, linking demographic data and ballot choices across multiple counties in these three states. Unsurprisingly, there was a partisan tilt—Republicans were more inclined to back vouchers than Democrats. However, the gap was far narrower than expected. In Colorado, for instance, a significant minority of voters who supported the Republican gubernatorial candidate opposed the voucher proposal. Many of these same individuals supported another constitutional amendment about abortion rights, revealing complex attitudes that do not always split cleanly along party lines.

Additionally, our research team gathered redacted cast vote records from six large Colorado counties. These anonymized files track individual ballots across different contests, offering insight into how the same voters approached multiple ballot measures. For example, some voters who supported the Republican gubernatorial candidate broke ranks when casting votes on the voucher plan or on other socially charged proposals—underscoring the nuanced ways that political leanings and local concerns interact in elections.

Two implications here are worth considering. First, we may well see less enthusiasm for trying to expand choice via costly ballot initiative campaigns. The fact that advocates are batting zero at the ballot box means that choice supporters likely have more politically attractive avenues for expanding the policy's footprint (i.e., legislatures). Second, the fact that we found relatively modest partisan polarization around school choice implies that many Democratic voters could still be persuaded to join a new reform coalition. This is especially relevant as legislative advocacy shifts toward blue states. However, overtly partisan strategies—like a federal voucher plan closely identified with the Trump administration—would be likely to backfire on choice supporters by driving away persuadable Democrats and solidifying the public's ideological views, mirroring President Trump's push to reopen schools during the pandemic and President Obama's support for Common Core standards.

The bottom line: widespread skepticism about the fiscal impact of vouchers, especially in non-urban areas, creates an uphill battle for advocates looking to expand choice by appealing to voters directly—even in staunchly conservative areas. These electoral setbacks for voucher supporters suggest that although the concept of choice is attractive to survey respondents in the abstract, it will continue to struggle to gain the trust of a majority of voters at the ballot box—signaling that more persuasive evidence or messaging would be needed to transform broad-based voucher programs into an attractive policy with voters.

Michael Hartney's website is https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/morrissey/departments/political-science/people/faculty-directory/michael-hartney.html

With Bob Maranto

Editor, *Journal of School Choice*

Interview

Everyone reading this should run for school board

JASON: Let's start by talking about some of the research you've presented to our section lately about free speech on college campuses. My own impression is that there's the concern that administrators are filtering ideas, but perhaps the more common fear among students and faculty is the threat of being labeled, accused, and harassed by people without any official power at all, maybe even without any affiliation with the campus. It feels like this is a new trend, but it's not, is it?

BOB: Great questions! To me, several forces have combined since 2014 to undermine free speech and free inquiry on campus, making college less fun and more fearful. Administrators and staff have outnumbered professors for over a generation, and bureaucracy naturally prioritizes compliance over curiosity. Dwight Eisenhower, who before becoming president led Columbia University, predicted this would happen to higher education in his 1961 farewell address, the “military industrial complex” speech.

I’m lead editor of a book coming out April 5th, *The Free Inquiry Papers* (AEI, 2025), which details the problems and fixes. Reforms will take years. Perhaps emblematic of how the ivory tower has fallen, two university presses passed on the book despite its timeliness, the expertise of contributors, and the quality of their contributions. We also had three authors pull out for reputational reasons when we chose center-right AEI rather than Lexington.

As Foundation of Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) data show, for a decade centrists and conservatives feared being isolated and even purged by leftist students, bureaucrats, and professors, often acting in concert. In just months, the second Trump administration has achieved fear equity: now both left and right fear to say, or not say, any number of things. I want to restore the 1990s when almost no one felt fear, but again, that will take years.

JASON: Speaking of free speech, you're the editor of the Journal of School Choice, and you've made it clear that the journal welcomes all ideologies and perspectives. I think most editors would claim to do the same, but I'd like to know how difficult it is to follow through on such a promise. Does the editorial board find itself publishing papers that -- while empirically sound -- pursue aims from perspectives that it disagrees with? Do you have to tell reviewers to keep their own political views in check as they consider the manuscripts you send them?

BOB: Alas, many editors no longer claim openness to a range of perspectives. Increasingly, education journals only welcome critical theory, which in my view has serious flaws. For example, in their introduction, the new editors of the prestigious *Review of Educational Research*, known for rigorous meta-analyses, declared they “seek to push back against racism

shrouded as rigor and narrow standards of quality that uphold racist, ableist, and other oppressive ways of knowing." They explicitly welcome Quantcrit and Critquant---but little else. Critical theory triumphs do not reflect years of debate, but years of veto power on hiring, tenure, and conference committees.

At *Journal of School Choice*, we publish many choice-skeptical articles, but they are not our most cited manuscripts, maybe because we fail to attract the best ones. When I took on the journal ten years back, it was more *for* school choice than *of* school choice. I incrementally changed the editorial board to have roughly one-third choice skeptics, to reduce groupthink. For controversial submissions, I invite equal numbers of (likely) pro and anti-choice reviewers, though I can't control who agrees to review. More positively, reviewers often defy my expectations, because most social scientists still attempt objectivity.

JASON: Let's talk about your time as an elected member of your local school board. I can imagine that you wore multiple hats during your tenure -- parent, taxpayer, educator. But I'd like to know what it was like being a researcher while on the school board. How did your research affect your approach to the school board, how did being on the school board affect your research?

BOB: I'm taking a long time writing a short book—hope to have a draft in August. Much of my research addresses school competition. My school district competes athletically and on facilities, but not academically, certainly not in seeking great teachers, who admin considers noncompliant. An academically focused charter school nearby has a long waitlist – before I got elected to board our oldest was on it – but system insiders consider the waitlist fake news.

On school board I learned that administrators range from saints to grifters. Board members have good intentions, but they love public schools as they are, not as reformers like me want them to be. Serving on school board showed me why the Bush/Obama reforms aiming to make schools more academic and close achievement gaps never had a chance. System insiders are opposed.

Social science offers understanding. For example, Rick Hess's *Spinning Wheels* (Brookings, 1998) shows how policymakers embrace multiple reforms for symbolic reasons but never really implement any before announcing new ones, alienating teachers. NEA members and I bonded over that. Or consider information asymmetries. Admin did not want board members to know too much – why would they? I knew a bit about the four schools my kids recently attended but very little about the other 12. You can't oversee what you don't understand.

JASON: Looking back, would you recommend that education scholars (like those reading this newsletter) run for school board in their communities?

BOB: YES! You learn how schools work, and with luck you can get some wins. I kept us from mass transferring the assistant principals, helped settle an expensive Title IX lawsuit, made us (for a time) hire math teachers who know math, and got teachers influence over high school

schedule changes. That last bit saved non-athletic student clubs, which matter to geeky kids like mine. Personally, my kids benefited from “school board armor” on scheduling, informal compensation if you will.

JASON: Your early research was about civil servants, so I'd like to ask about the current president's cuts to staff in the Department of Education. You probably have a lot of thoughts on this topic, but for the sake of brevity, what's one mistake you see the administration making and one possible positive outcome?

BOB: I’m unhappy, not at DOGE cuts per se, but at their rapidity, sometimes questionable legality, and lack of consultation. DOGE differs from the Reagan and Clinton cutbacks. Maybe this time the sky really has fallen.

Negative: DOGE slashed the Institute for Education Sciences. David Marshall and I have a piece in *RealClearEducation* urging undoing that. The shifts to phonics in teaching reading were spread not by education professors, but by journalist Emily Hanford’s Sold a Story podcast, which humanized years of IES research showing phonic-based instruction works better, especially for disadvantaged kids. Without IES, teachers would still be in the dark about how best to teach reading. That’s just one example where IES made a difference.

Positive: Shep Melnick’s *The Transformation of Title IX* makes a strong case for completely remaking the department’s Office for Civil Rights. Expansive OCR rules savaged free speech, making professors and students afraid and fueling MAGA. Distant, low-level bureaucrats should not redefine something as important as sex with nontransparent “Dear Colleague letters” evading the APA’s open, deliberative processes. OCR seems anti-pluralist, so remake it.

JASON: To close our interview, tell me about the idea for a new APSA section devoted to diversity of ideologies. What do you hope it can accomplish and what progress has been made?

BOB: I’ve always praised Political Science for our relative pluralism. I tend libertarian/Republican but was mentored by social democrats who valued ideological diversity. That pluralism is slipping away, so APSA needs a heterodox section to keep pluralism alive. This cannot be another marginal conservative group---APSA already has at least two. A heterodox section must have ideological diversity and ideally include APSA leaders. We had a good initial zoom, with over 30 either attending or trying to. I need to set up a new meeting and find people to run this. I’m not the right person to run anything, but this is the right time. APSA’s Madisonian past offers guidance for depolarization in academia, and America.

Bob Maranto is the Endowed Chair and Professor in Education Leadership at the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas and the editor of the *Journal of School Choice*.

Jason Giersch is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Administration and Associate Director of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Recent Articles from the Section

Cantwell-Chavez, Devon, and Jourdan Davis (2024). Navigating Generative AI Tools in the Classroom Through a Lens of Equity and Accessibility. *Journal of Political Science Education*.

Garritzmann, Julian L., Silja Häusermann, and Michael Pinggera (2024). Under What Conditions do Citizens Support Future-Oriented Reforms? Public Opinion and Second Dimension Welfare Politics. *European Sociological Review*.

Giersch, Jason (2025). Notions of critical race theory and choosing school board candidates. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*.

Jensen, Andreas Videbæk (2025). Educating for Democracy? Going to College Increases Political Participation. *British Journal of Political Science*.

Kaufman-Osborn, Timothy (2024). Critical University Studies and Critical Political Science. *Encyclopedia of Critical Political Science*.

Kaufman-Osborn, Timothy (2024). On the Impossibility of Free Inquiry within the American Academy. *Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy*.

Upcoming Books in the Section

Houston, David (forthcoming). *The Long Division: How the Politics of Education Became Partisan*. Oxford University Press.

.

Conference & Workshop Opportunities

The **WPSA Education Politics & Policy Virtual Community** is a monthly virtual workshop where scholars of education politics and policy present works-in-progress and get feedback. We meet the last Wednesday of every month from 3-4pm ET. Participants include political scientists, public policy scholars, education scholars that focus on relevant topics and others. The goal of the research workshop is to build a thriving, productive, and friendly community of researchers focused on education politics and policy. The workshop is diverse in terms of methods, topics, and regional focus. Please write Leslie Finger (leslie.finger@unt.edu), David Houston (dhousto@gmu.edu) or Mimi Lyon (mlyon@albany.edu) if you'd like to join the mailing list and/or would like to present your work.

The **Annual Meeting of APSA 2025** will be in Vancouver, British Columbia, September 11-14.

Share *your* news in our next issue by following this link:
https://forms.gle/gkP3wyJib59g7Hsr9