

The Democratic Candidates’ Positions on School Diversity & Related Educational Equity Issues – as of June 28, 2019

By Philip Tegeler¹ and Abi Hollinger²

After last week’s Democratic presidential debates, school integration has unexpectedly emerged as a serious issue in the campaign, as Senator Kamala Harris asserted the importance of school integration, based on her own experience growing up in Berkeley, California, and criticized Vice President Biden for his anti-busing positions (and collaborations) in the 1970s.

Coincidentally, this debate comes at a time when the National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSd) and a growing school diversity movement both inside and outside government are pushing to remove these last remaining vestiges from the “anti-busing” years – blanket prohibitions on the use of federal funds for student transportation to support integration. Last year, with bipartisan support, two perennial anti-busing budget riders attached to the federal budget were removed.³ And this year, there is growing support in Congress to remove the final anti-busing provision, section 426 of the General Education Provisions Statute, originally passed in 1974.⁴ This effort is part of a broader federal policy agenda of the school integration movement, reflected in the NCSd’s federal policy priorities for 2019, including removal of Section 426, passage of the Strength in Diversity competitive grants program, expanded funding for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, for interdistrict school planning, and for the Equity Assistance Centers (which assist local districts in school integration planning).⁵ NCSd has also called for reinstatement of the 2011 school diversity guidance letter, reinstatement of the school integration incentives for Department of Education competitive grant funds, and linking the Magnet Schools Assistance Program with HUD’s Choice Neighborhoods public housing redevelopment program.⁶ A number of these policy proposals are part of the candidates’ education platforms, which are reviewed in this brief.

The Candidates

Senator Bernie Sanders has offered the most comprehensive approach to school diversity. His list of proposals includes increasing federal funding for community-driven strategies to desegregate schools, funding school transportation and ending funding penalties for schools that attempt to desegregate, enforcing desegregation orders, and appointing federal judges who will enforce the 1964 Civil Rights Act in schools.⁷ Former Vice

¹ Executive Director, Poverty & Race Research Action Council.

² George Washington University School of Law, class of 2021.

³ See <https://school-diversity.org/press-release-40-organizations-join-ncsd-in-requesting-removal-of-anti-integration-riders/>

⁴ Section 426 of General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) states that: “No funds appropriated for the purpose of carrying out any applicable program may be used for the transportation of students or teachers (or for the purchase of equipment for such transportation) in order to overcome racial imbalance in any school or school system, or for the transportation of students or teachers (or for the purchase of equipment for such transportation) in order to carry out a plan of racial desegregation of any school or school system...”

⁵ https://school-diversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/NCSd_Policy-Doc_Final3.pdf

⁶ Id.

⁷ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education> (last visited June 27, 2019)

President Joe Biden and Julián Castro (former HUD Secretary), are the only other candidates who have explicitly addressed school diversity in their platforms; Biden has promised to reinstate Department of Education guidance supporting desegregation⁸ and plans to provide grants to school districts that pursue integration,⁹ a program developed by President Obama’s Secretary of Education, John King, that was subsequently cancelled by Secretary Betsy DeVos.¹⁰ Castro’s website links housing and school segregation and pledges that he will “combat racial segregation in schools and reduce educational disparities by working to integrate communities.”¹¹ Most of the candidates who have weighed in on school integration also have well-developed educational equity platforms – Castro, for example, calls for investments in pre-K and teacher salaries, addressing funding disparities, and ending the school-to-prison pipeline.¹²

Some candidates have addressed the issue of school integration generally in public comments – most notable the forceful statements of Senator Kamala Harris in the recent Democratic debates. Senator Amy Klobuchar recently posted a Tweet commemorating the anniversary of *Brown v. Board*, noting that there is still “a long way to go.”¹³ However, unlike Castro, she does not make any mention of the issue on her website.¹⁴ And while Senator Elizabeth Warren does not mention the issue on her website, she did co-sponsor the Strength in Diversity Act, which would “award competitive grants for the development or implementation of plans to improve diversity or eliminate socioeconomic or racial isolation in public schools,”¹⁵ and she recently reiterated her support for the bill in response to the Harris-Biden exchange on June 27th.

Other candidates, like Beto O’Rourke, Kirsten Gillibrand, Pete Buttigieg, and Cory Booker have so far been silent on the issue of school diversity, although have spoken out generally in support of educational equity. For example, one area of debate has been the issue of school choice and the various educational options that fall underneath. School choice covers a wide range of K-12 options beyond the traditional public school system, including charter schools, magnet schools, private schools, and school vouchers.¹⁶ Only three candidates – Senator Cory Booker, Senator Michael Bennet, and Representative Seth Moulton – have endorsed the concept of school choice in a general way.¹⁷ Conversely, O’Rourke, former Texas Representative, renounced the school choice framework, arguing that school choice is really just “a ploy to funnel funds reserved for public education into private schools.”¹⁸ Within the school choice framework, candidates have largely ignored the question of magnet schools.

Charter schools, which are among the most segregated schools in the U.S.,¹⁹ have received more attention and at times been the subject of intense debate. Some candidates have already taken positions on the issue as legislators. Warren opposed a ballot initiative in Massachusetts that would have allowed more charter schools in

⁸ See <https://school-diversity.org/picsguidance/>.

⁹ Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education> (last visited June 27, 2019)

¹⁰ Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://issues.juliancastro.com/people-first-education> (last visited June 28, 2019)

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Amy Klobuchar (@amyklobuchar), Twitter (May 13, 2019, 11:34 AM), <https://twitter.com/amyklobuchar/status/1128005517958352898>

¹³ Amy Klobuchar, *Issues*, <https://amyklobuchar.com/issues/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

¹⁴ Strength in Diversity Act of 2018, H.R. 6722, 115th Cong. (2018)

¹⁵ What is School Choice?, <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/what-is-school-choice/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

¹⁶ Patrick Wall, *Cory Booker has been an ed reform favorite. That could be a problem for his 2020 campaign.*, Chalkbeat (Feb. 1, 2019), <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2019/02/01/cory-booker-education-reform/>; Nic Garcia, *Colorado U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet: DeVos ‘wrong’ about school choice in Denver*, Chalkbeat (Mar. 30, 2017), <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2017/03/30/colorado-u-s-sen-michael-bennet-devos-wrong-about-school-choice-in-denver/>; Seth Moulton (@sethmoulton), Twitter (Oct. 17, 2017, 7:57 PM), <https://twitter.com/sethmoulton/status/920483905005867013>

¹⁷ Beto O’Rourke (@BetoORourke), Twitter (Apr. 9, 2018, 4:09 PM), <https://twitter.com/betoorourke/status/983481977541017600>

¹⁸ Ivan Moreno, *US charter schools put growing numbers in racial isolation*, Associated Press (Dec. 3, 2017), <https://www.apnews.com/e9c25534dfd44851a5e56bd57454b4f5>

the state.²⁰ Conversely, Booker was a champion of charter schools as a New Jersey Senator and, since announcing his presidential bid, has maintained his stance that some charter school models work.²¹ Several candidates are categorically opposed to for-profit charter schools, including Sanders and Warren.²² Sanders also advocates for a moratorium on public funds to all charter schools in order to assess their impact, and increased accountability if charter schools are allowed to continue operating.²³ Biden opposes federal funding to for-profit charter schools but has not gone so far as to say he would eliminate them altogether.²⁴

Candidates have released proposals on other educational equity goals, ranging from increasing funding to schools that serve low-income students to universal pre-kindergarten. Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders have committed to tripling funding to Title I schools,²⁵ which have “high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families.”²⁶ Pete Buttigieg, Kamala Harris, and Beto O’Rourke have also committed to increasing federal aid to public schools serving low-income students, though they have not said by how much.²⁷ In her proposal, Harris pointed out that almost 45 percent of Black and Latinx students attend the schools that would receive the additional investments she proposes.²⁸ Senator Warren has so far been notably absent from the conversation on funding to K-12 schools, focusing her proposals on debt-free college and wiping away student loans.²⁹

A number of candidates have said the best way to improve education for low-income students is to invest in their teachers. Biden and Buttigieg say increasing funding to Title I schools will do just that.³⁰ But several candidates want to go further. Sanders plans to set a nationwide starting salary for teachers at \$60,000.³¹ Harris’ priority is to close the teacher pay gap - the difference between what public school educators and comparable workers are paid.³² Under her plan, the federal government would provide the first 10 percent of funding to close that gap. The plan would then incentivize states to invest in closing the remainder by providing federal

²⁰ Spencer Buell, *Elizabeth Warren Won’t Support Charter School Expansion*, Boston Magazine (Sept. 27, 2016), <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2016/09/27/elizabeth-warren-charter-schools/>

²¹ Emily Larsen, *Cory Booker breaks with Bernie Sanders over charter schools*, Washington Examiner (May 25, 2019), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/cory-booker-breaks-with-bernie-sanders-over-charter-schools>

²² Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Naomi Lin, *Elizabeth Warren: For-profit charter schools are ‘a real problem’*, Washington Examiner (May 18, 2019), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/elizabeth-warren-for-profit-charter-schools-are-a-real-problem>

²³ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

²⁴ Katie Glueck, *Joe Biden Debuts Education Plan, Then Touts It to Teachers’ Union*, New York Times (May 28, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/28/us/politics/biden-education-plan-2020.html>

²⁵ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

²⁶ U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A)* (Oct. 24, 2018), <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

²⁷ Pete Buttigieg, *Democracy*, <https://peteforamerica.com/issues/#Democracy> (last visited June 28, 2017); Kamala Harris, *AMERICA’S TEACHERS DESERVE A RAISE*, <https://kamalaharris.org/teachers/> (last visited June 28, 2019); John C. Moritz, *Trump, ICE, education, and more: Where Beto O’Rourke stands on key issues*, El Paso Times (last updated Mar. 30, 2019), <https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2019/03/14/beto-orourke-stances-2020-us-policy-trump-wall-ice-education-energy/3110524002/>

²⁸ Kamala Harris, *AMERICA’S TEACHERS DESERVE A RAISE*, <https://kamalaharris.org/teachers/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

²⁹ Ella Nilsen, *Elizabeth Warren has the biggest free college plan yet*, Vox (Apr. 22, 2019), <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/22/18509196/elizabeth-warren-debt-free-college>

³⁰ Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Pete Buttigieg, *Democracy*, <https://peteforamerica.com/issues/#Democracy> (last visited June 28, 2017)

³¹ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

³² Tim Walker, *Teacher Pay Gap Reaches a Record High*, NEA Today (Sept. 6, 2018), <http://neatoday.org/2018/09/06/teacher-pay-gap-reaches-record-high/>

funds to match state contributions.³³ Castro wants to fund teacher residency programs, which would be prioritized in “high-need, underserved communities,” and provide grants to people who want to pursue careers in teaching.³⁴ Representative Tulsi Gabbard and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand have publicly expressed their support for increases in teacher pay but have not revealed any specific proposals on the issue.³⁵ Several candidates have emphasized the need to increase teacher diversity – Biden said he will invest in recruiting teachers of color, and Sanders and Castro have proposed limited plans which would target higher education educators at HBCUs and minority-serving institutions.³⁶

Several candidates have addressed the fact that students of color are disciplined at higher rates and face harsher punishments than white students.³⁷ Klobuchar has stated she would re-issue guidance to schools to address the disparity.³⁸ Castro has advocated for an end of the school-to-prison pipeline by combating “unfair, harsh, and unequal disciplinary methods” and requiring schools to implement relevant reforms to receive federal funding.³⁹ On his website, Sanders says he will “[a]ddress disciplinary practices in schools that disproportionately affect Black and Brown children.”⁴⁰ O’Rourke tweeted about disparities in disciplining in Texas schools but has not integrated reform into official his platform.⁴¹

Educational equity has also come up around access to early childhood education and school meals. Many candidates have recognized the need for expanded access to early childhood education. Biden, Yang, and O’Rourke advocate for universal pre-kindergarten.⁴² John Delaney authored two (unsuccessful) bills to expand universal pre-kindergarten as a Maryland Representative.⁴³ Both Gillibrand and Warren have also advocated for expanded access to free early childhood education, though neither have gone as far as universal pre-

³³ Kamala Harris, *AMERICA'S TEACHERS DESERVE A RAISE*, <https://kamalaharris.org/teachers/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

³⁴ Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

³⁵ Tulsi Gabbard (@TulsiGabbard), Twitter (May 7, 2019), <https://twitter.com/TulsiGabbard/status/1125914320196505601> ; Kirsten Gillibrand, *Fighting for women and families*, <https://kirstengillibrand.com/issues/women-and-families/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

³⁶ Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

³⁷ Anne Gregory et al., *The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap: Two Sides of the Same Coin?*, American Educational Research Association, 3 (Nov. 2, 2009), <http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Gregory-et-al.-The-Achievement-Gap-and-the-Discipline-Gap-Two-Sides-of-the-Same-Coin.pdf>

³⁸ Amy Klobuchar, *Senator Amy Klobuchar Releases Plan of More Than 100 Actions for Her First 100 Days as President*, Medium (June 18, 2019), <https://medium.com/@AmyforAmerica/amys-first-100-days-b7adf9f91262>

³⁹ Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

⁴⁰ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019)

⁴¹ Beto O’Rourke (@BetoORourke), Twitter (Mar. 27, 2018), <https://twitter.com/betoorourke/status/978820701804253184?lang=en>

⁴² Joe Biden, *Joe’s Plan for Educators, Students, and our Future*, <https://joebiden.com/education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Andrew Yang, *EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL*, <https://www.yang2020.com/policies/early-childhood-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019); Lisa Desjardins, *What does Beto O’Rourke believe? Where the candidate stands on 8 issues*, PBS (Mar. 14, 2019), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/what-does-beto-orourke-believe-where-the-candidate-stands-on-8-issues>

⁴³ Press Release, U.S. Congressman John Delaney (July 27, 2017), <https://web.archive.org/web/20181222193258/https://delaney.house.gov/news/press-releases/delaney-re-introduces-legislation-to-give-parents-nationwide-option-to-enroll>

kindergarten.⁴⁴ Several candidates - Sanders and Castro - have committed to providing free breakfast and lunch in public schools to ensure students do not go hungry.⁴⁵

A number of candidates have also released housing proposals which would inevitably impact racial compositions of neighborhoods and therefore schools, whether they offer that as a stated reason for the policy or not. PRRAC will be releasing an analysis of these fair housing positions soon.⁴⁶ Warren's housing plan has substantial fair housing content: for example, she wants to provide down-payment assistance to first-time homebuyers who live in "formerly redlined neighborhoods that were segregated by law and are still currently low-income,"⁴⁷ as part of a plan to address a current system that locks families of color "out of neighborhoods with better schools and job opportunities."⁴⁸ Castro, as former HUD Secretary, also strongly emphasizes fair housing, for example stating that a progressive housing policy must "include Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing,"⁴⁹ and providing for extensive expansion of the housing choice voucher program, among other measures. Klobuchar and Buttigieg also address racial segregation in housing in their official platforms,⁵⁰ but their positions, at this stage of the campaign are light on actual details.

The presidential campaign is still young, and we expect many of these candidates' positions to evolve, particularly on the issue of school integration, which Senator Harris and Vice President Biden have now brought into the spotlight.

⁴⁴ Kirsten Gillibrand, *Fighting for women and families*, <https://kirstengillibrand.com/issues/women-and-families/> (last visited June 28, 2019); Elizabeth Warren, *My plan for Universal Child Care*, Medium (Feb. 19, 2019), <https://medium.com/@teamwarren/my-plan-for-universal-child-care-762535e6c20a>

⁴⁵ Bernie Sanders, *A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education*, <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/> (last visited June 27, 2019); Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

⁴⁶ PRRAC's analysis of the candidates' positions on fair housing issues will be released the week of July 8th.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Warren, *My Housing Plan for America*, Medium (Mar. 16, 2019), <https://medium.com/@teamwarren/my-housing-plan-for-america-20038e19dc26>

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Julián Castro, *People First Education*, <https://www.julianforthefuture.com/news-events/people-first-education/> (last visited June 28, 2019)

⁵⁰ Amy Klobuchar, *Shared Prosperity and Economic Justice*, <https://amyklobuchar.com/issues/shared-prosperity-and-economic-justice/> (last visited June 28, 2019); Pete Buttigieg, *Democracy*, <https://peteforamerica.com/issues/#Democracy> (last visited June 28, 2017)

Statements from Candidates

School Diversity:

- Julian Castro
 - "Combat racial segregation in schools and reduce educational disparities by working to integrate communities. Fulfill the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* through a progressive housing policy that includes affirmatively furthering fair housing, implementing zoning reform, and expanding affordable housing in high opportunity areas. These efforts will reduce racial segregation in classrooms." - <https://issues.juliancastro.com/people-first-education/>
 - "At the onset of our public school system, one student's success was valued over another. Although we ended sanctioned segregation in our schools many years ago, widespread disparities between students continue today. We can't have integrated schools if our housing and communities are segregated." - <https://issues.juliancastro.com/people-first-education/>
- Joe Biden
 - "Reinstate the Obama-Biden Administration's actions to diversify our schools. As President, Biden will reinstate Department of Education guidance that supported schools in legally pursuing desegregation strategies and recognized institutions of higher education's interests in creating diverse student bodies. And, he will provide grants to school districts to create plans and implement strategies to diversify their schools." - <https://joebiden.com/education/>
- Bernie Sanders
 - "[D]ue to re-segregation of our K-12 schools, if you are a student of color, chances are your math, science and reading scores are even lower. Persistent disparities in achievement among underserved students means that we must do more to make sure that every student in the country gets a high-quality education regardless of how much income his or her family makes. If our public schools are struggling, then we cannot possibly expect our students to be prepared for success in postsecondary education." - <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/>
 - "Bernie's education plan addresses the serious crisis in our education system by reducing racial and economic segregation in our public school system, attracting the best and the brightest educational professionals to teach in our classrooms, and reestablishing a positive learning environment for students in our K-12 schools. This plan calls for a transformative investment in our children, our teachers and our schools and a fundamental re-thinking of the unjust and inequitable funding of our public education system." - <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/>
- Amy Klobuchar
 - "This week marks 65 years since the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared school segregation unconstitutional. A step forward for equality and justice, but a reminder that there is so much more work to be done and we have a long way to go." - <https://twitter.com/amyklobuchar/status/1128005517958352898>

Educational Equity:

- Housing policy
 - Elizabeth Warren
 - "Housing is not just the biggest expense for most American families — or the biggest purchase most Americans will make in their lifetimes. It also affects the jobs you can get, the schools your children can go to, and the kinds of communities you can live in. That's why it's so important that government gets housing policy right." - <https://medium.com/@teamwarren/my-housing-plan-for-america-20038e19dc26>
 - Julian Castro
 - "We must protect against gentrification as we work to revitalize our neighborhoods. And we must do more to desegregate our neighborhoods, which will also lead to desegregation of our children's schools. However, in recent years we've taken steps backward. Rather than working to eliminate housing discrimination, the Trump administration froze a landmark rule passed during

my time at HUD to ensure all communities had the resources needed to overcome historic segregation." - <https://issues.juliancastro.com/people-first-housing/>

- Charter schools
 - Bernie Sanders
 - "Moreover, the proliferation of charter schools has disproportionately affected communities of color – 17 percent of charter schools are 99 percent minority, compared to 4 percent of traditional public schools. This has led the NAACP, the NEA, AFT and others to criticize the charter movement for intensifying racial segregation. The damage to communities caused by unregulated charter school growth must be stopped and reversed." - <https://berniesanders.com/a-thurgood-marshall-plan-for-public-education/>
- Funding for schools serving low-income students
 - Kamala Harris
 - "Under our plan, every public school in America will be able to pay their teachers as much as other comparable professionals in their state. But tackling decades of inequality requires we go further. Our plan makes an additional targeted investment, beyond just closing the gap, to pay teachers in America's highest-need schools more than other comparable professionals in their state. In allocating the investment, we'll take into account the extent to which these schools face high rates of funding inequality. [...] Students and teachers of color disproportionately learn and work in these schools. For example, nearly 45 percent of Black and Latinx students in America attend public schools that will receive this additional investment." - <https://kamalaharris.org/teachers/>
- Discipline
 - Beto O'Rourke
 - "In Texas, students of color from Pre-K to 2nd grade are five times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their white peers. These actions heavily impact their quality of education -- this is what the school-to-prison pipeline looks like." - <https://twitter.com/betoorourke/status/978820701804253184?lang=en>
- Teacher pay
 - Pete Buttigieg
 - "We need to respect and value our teachers as the essential public servants that they are, and we need to compensate them accordingly. We need federal support for boosting teacher pay, and we need to begin by directing it to Title I schools — the schools with the most economic and racial inequity, and with the most students on free and reduced price lunch." - <https://peteforamerica.com/issues/#Democracy>