



**The Washington Flyer
December 3, 2021**

“The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty; and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments.”
Benjamin Rush

Parents Push Back Against Social Emotional Learning

Parents across the country are beginning to speak out against the inclusion of social and emotional learning (SEL) in their children’s public schools. SEL is a popular educational philosophy that focuses on teaching values and behavior over academics. In recent months, proponents of SEL have pointed to the pandemic and the rise in racial tensions as impetus to increase the SEL instruction and counseling provided in schools. According to [one report](#), the spending by public school districts increased by about \$235 million between the 2019–20 and 2020–21 school years, and the focus of administrators shifted to the priority of addressing students’ mental health over their academic needs. While there are currently no established SEL standards, many of the SEL materials used are provided by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) (CASEL), an organization established in 1994 with the mission to “help make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school.” Most SEL programs focus on controlling emotions in the younger grades then move to issues of mental health, race, and sexuality in upper grades. Many parents are pushing back, charging that SEL instruction is simply a “trojan horse” for infusing critical race theory and gender issues into the schools. Asra Nomani, a parent from Fairfax County, Virginia, and leader of Parents Defending Education which has been on the front lines in the education battle in northern Virginia, [charged](#) that after the death of George Floyd in 2020, SEL “became a vehicle for this . . . ‘social justice activism’ and the indoctrination of controversial ideas related to race, sexuality and even gender and identity.”

Parents are also expressing concern that SEL programs are overstepping the academic purpose of education and delving into issues that should be left to parents to discuss with their children. A mother in the Carroll Independent School District in Texas [charged](#) that the SEL programs at her child’s school were essentially “advertising suicide.” Another mother, Chrissy Holets in Fillmore County, Minnesota, [expressed concern](#) in a school board meeting over the SEL instruction at her elementary daughter’s class: “The program is systematically designed to get kids to rely on the school instead of on their families. It leads to children sharing more information than should be shared in a school setting. It also teaches removal of personal autonomy. The goal of social emotional ideology is to teach children to all act alike within a program.” The American Enterprise Institute recently published a [report](#) that emphasizes this point and notes one of the main flaws in the SEL movement: “SEL advocates are attempting to update or restore the character-forming role of education but in a manner estranged from its religious and moral roots.”

Supreme Court Hears Oral Arguments in Abortion Case

This Wednesday, the Supreme Court heard [oral arguments](#) in the case [Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization](#), a case that challenges Mississippi’s ban on abortions after fifteen weeks gestation. The bulk of the oral arguments focused on viability, when an unborn baby can survive outside the womb, and a legal

doctrine called *stare decisis*, the Court’s upholding of past rulings as binding in future cases. Mississippi Solicitor General Scott Stewart argued that *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the pair of landmark abortion cases in the U.S., were wrong because they were not grounded in the Constitution, history, or tradition. He argued that the Supreme Court should be neutral regarding abortion and return the controversial issue to the states where the people can debate and craft their own policy. On the other side, Center for Reproductive Rights Senior Director Julie Rikelman argued that a woman’s liberty was the constitutional issue at stake, claiming that women will never achieve equality if a state can force them to carry a pregnancy to term. Justice Thomas focused on the fact that abortion is not grounded in the Constitution at all and led attorney Elizabeth Prelogar, who represented the Biden administration, to admit that the fundamental right at issue was not liberty, but the right to an abortion. Justices Barrett, Kavanaugh, Alito, and Gorsuch also pressed the pro-abortion side on the shaky constitutional ground that abortion has rested on for the past fifty years. Pro-life advocates were left [cautiously optimistic](#) that the case could be narrowly decided in favor of the life of an unborn child.

Senate Republicans Call for AG to Testify Regarding Parents Memo

Senate Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee sent a [letter](#) to U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland requesting that he testify before the committee regarding his October 4 memorandum which was issued as a response to a letter sent to President Biden from the National School Board Association claiming that parents who opposed school boards’ policies were becoming a threat. During a hearing on October 27, Garland asserted that the purpose of his memo was simply to set up meetings and “to get our law enforcement to assess the extent of the problem.” However, since that hearing, reports from across the country have indicated that state attorneys general are taking more aggressive actions against parents based on the Garland memo. The GOP letter notes that Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Montana Leif M. Johnson sent a letter to local officials listing “12 federal statutes under which parents could potentially be charged—including ‘repeated telephone calls’ or ‘anonymous telecommunications harassment’—and offered to ‘collaborate’ with local entities to bring ‘federal investigation[s] and prosecution[s].’” In addition, the letter notes that a whistleblower revealed that the FBI Criminal Investigative Division and Counterterrorism Division “instructed their agents and analysts to use a designated threat tag whenever they encounter potential threats, harassment, and intimidation of school officials.” The GOP Senators note that, contrary to what Garland claimed, this suggests his memorandum has prompted the FBI to “pursue investigations, including using counterterrorism authorities and tools” against parents.

In Case You Missed It:

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[Practical Legal Help for Christian Schools: ADF Ministry Alliance](#)

[Promise to America’s Children](#)

[Biden Administration Quietly Accelerates its Assault on Religious Freedom](#)

[16 Attorneys General Sign Amicus Brief Supporting Religious Liberty in Jack Phillips Case](#)

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