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Parents Matter. Why Is That Controversial?

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The release of a new book by economist Melissa Kearney, *The Two-Parent Privilege*, generated an impressive amount of press coverage in late September. Professor Kearney’s op-ed summarizing her book was published in the *New York Times*, followed by a Nicholas Kristof column chiding his fellow liberals for not wanting to talk about the importance of married parents to children.

The *Washington Post* also had two columnists write about it, Megan McArdle and Christine Emba. The *Wall Street Journal* published both a book review by Michael Luca and an opinion piece by Jason Riley. The American Enterprise Institute hosted Melissa Kearney for a one-hour book discussion that was streamed on Zoom.

The main conclusions of her book are pretty intuitive:

- Two-parent families are beneficial for children.
- The class divide in marriage and family structure has exacerbated inequality and class gaps.
- Places that have more two-parent families have higher rates of upward mobility.
- Not talking about these facts is counterproductive.

Over the past 60 years, dozens of books and studies have reached similar conclusions. Before he was a U.S. Senator, Daniel Patrick Moynihan became famous with his 1965 report on the decline in family formation within black communities. More recently, Isabel Sawhill and Ron Haskins helped popularize the notion of a “Success Sequence” with their book, *Creating an Opportunity Society*. The Sequence can be summarized as: (1) graduate high school; (2) get a full-time job; and (3) don’t have children outside of marriage. More than 90% of people who follow the sequence are not poor.

Given this established body of scholarship, I was curious as to why Melissa Kearney was getting so much favorable coverage for her book. After watching the AEI webinar, I think I know why.

First, she's not a conservative. She's an MIT-trained economist working at the University of Maryland, prominent in her field, and generally well liked by her mostly liberal colleagues.

Second, she is deliberately trying to stay out of the culture wars. Her book, while easy to read, is heavy on data and tries to couch this as simply an unpleasant conversation we need to have.

Third, she's an engaging speaker with a good sense of humor.



Perhaps the messenger is more important than the message. That's fine with me. She's a great messenger, and the liberals who control the policy apparatus of many states need to talk about family and culture.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Oregon, where public conversations about the racial achievement gap in schools are dominated by claims of institutional racism. The most recent was a tirade by State Board of Education Chair Guadalupe Martinez Zapata before a September board meeting, regarding a planned discussion of state testing requirements for high school graduation that were temporarily suspended by the state legislature in 2021.

A number of parents objected to the issue being placed on the “consent agenda” for the Board meeting, since consent items are not normally discussed. In an interview with *The Oregonian*, Martinez Zapata referred to the concern as an “organized misinformation campaign” led by some lawmakers and a “cadre of common, well-known bad actors.”

She further stated, “Some of the misinformation is presented with artistic quality, mental acrobatics, such that it might be tempting to believe those alternative facts, if only they weren't automatically discredited by a myopic analysis and bigotry that follows them.”

Martinez Zapata later said her comments were not directed specifically at people who submitted public feedback for the board meeting, but around larger conversations to do with graduation requirements and student success, which she says often invoke “racist tropes that students of color don't succeed at the same rates as their white peers because of cultural differences, not because of systemic inequities.”

The State Board of Education is still fighting the last war. Maybe I should send them all copies of Melissa Kearney's book.

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“Principle of Subsidiarity” Motivates New Development Coordinator

— Cascade Policy Institute welcomes Joshua Schutte



Originally from Dayton, Ohio, I spent most of my life in the Midwest before moving to Oregon. I was homeschooled through high school. After graduation, I attended Franciscan University of Steubenville. I graduated with my bachelor’s degree in experimental psychology and moved back home to work for the Dayton chapter of St. Vincent de Paul. I worked in donor relations and fundraising for St. Vincent de Paul’s homeless shelters and rehousing ministries before accepting my current position as Development Coordinator at Cascade Policy Institute.

Going into college, I had very little desire to enter the political realm; and even through the first few years at Franciscan, I had no interest in that area. I had worked as a handyman and a headstone engraver for a few years when I was on breaks from school, and I was planning to continue working in headstone engraving after graduation. The development job for St. Vincent de Paul presented itself as a better option, however, so I decided to dive into the nonprofit world.

Over the year following graduation, I became more interested in politics and policy work as I participated in the Forge Leadership Academy and started following my sister’s work at National Review. I realized I wanted to work in the policy world; and since I was already planning to move to the Pacific Northwest, I decided to apply for a job at Cascade Policy Institute.

Many of the friends I made in the public policy world have headed to Washington, D.C. to work on the Hill, but I have a greater desire to work at the state and local levels. I believe strongly in the principle of subsidiarity, the idea that as many decisions as possible should be made at the lowest level possible. Our Founders seemed to believe in this principle as well, which is why they gave most of the power to the states. Our daily lives are

more affected by state and local decisions than by the decisions of the federal government, and I want to work on the practical issues that face the people living directly around me.

I am excited to have this opportunity to work for Cascade to advocate not just for Americans, or just for Oregonians, but for my neighbors and my friends.

Joshua Schutte is Development Coordinator at Cascade Policy Institute. He can be reached at joshua@cascadepolicy.org



It's not an exaggeration: 2023 is the Year of Education Freedom. This year alone, eight states have passed or expanded universal or near-universal school choice programs. Families choosing to opt into these programs may direct a portion of the state education funding allocated for their child to pay for education costs including private school tuition and other education services.

Families increasingly want the ability to choose schools and education resources that best meet their children's academic and developmental needs and that reflect their values. According to a RealClear Opinion Research poll this summer, 71% percent of voters now say parents should "have the right to use tax dollars designated for their child's education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs."

Ten states now offer either an Education Savings Account, voucher, or tax credit option to all (or almost all) K-12 students in their states. Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Utah, and West Virginia have universal Education Savings Account (ESA) programs (meaning all K-12 students are eligible to opt in if their parents choose). About 98% of Indiana's school-aged children are eligible to participate in their newly expanded ESA program. Oklahoma recently passed the nation's first universal education tax credit program, available to all Oklahoma parents. Ohio and North Carolina made their voucher programs universal. Other state legislatures expanded their programs this year, through new legislation, to include more students.

ESAs, vouchers, and education tax credits are different policy approaches that have the same goal: They empower parents to choose the best learning options for their children by putting education funding directly into their hands. States can learn valuable lessons from each other's policy approaches as they craft programs to suit the needs of their own families and voters.

Briefly, this is how these programs work (see edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/):

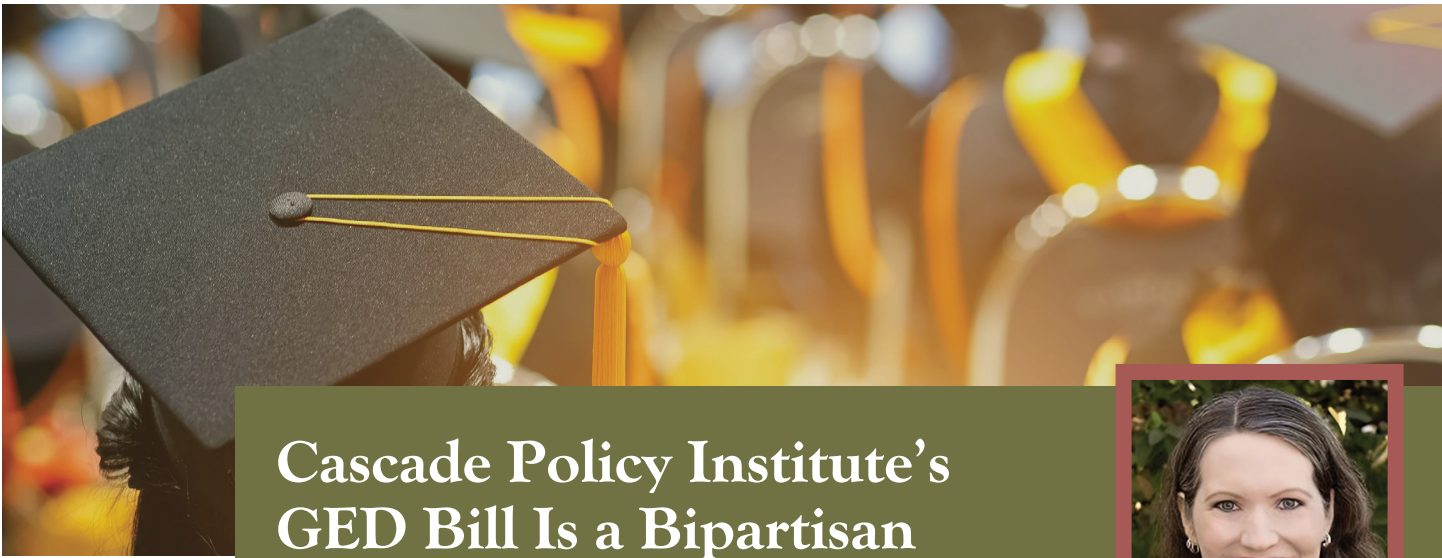
Education Savings Accounts, also called "Scholarship Accounts," are publicly funded, government-authorized savings accounts that have restricted but multiple uses. They are normally funded by some or all of the state-level, per-pupil education spending allocation. Parents may use their children's ESAs to pay for tuition, tutoring, online programs, therapies for students with special needs, and instructional materials. ESAs often can be used for home education expenses as well. Some ESA programs allow funding to roll over from year to year and pay for higher education if any funds remain after 12th grade.

Vouchers allow parents to direct part of the public funding set aside for their children's education for use at tuition-based schools. Under voucher programs, education funding is allocated to a participating family to pay tuition at the child's private school. In June 2020, the Supreme Court held in ***Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*** that states that enact private educational choice programs (like vouchers and ESAs) cannot exclude their use at religiously affiliated schools (see [ij.org/case/montana-school-choice](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/20-1/2016161.html)).

Individual education tax credits give parents state income tax relief for approved educational expenses. Oklahoma's recently passed Parental Choice Tax Credit Program is a refundable tax credit. Refundable tax credits help families who may have lower tax liabilities to benefit from the program.

States that are empowering parents to find the right fit for their children's educational needs are opening doors of opportunity for generations of students. The "school choice states" provide legislative models Oregon can follow. It's time Oregon let education funding follow the child to the school of his or her choice. All students should be able to learn in the educational environments that are best for them and find their paths to success.

Kathryn Hickok is Executive Vice President at Cascade Policy Institute and Director of Cascade's Children's Scholarship Fund-Oregon program. She can be reached at kathryn@cascadepolicy.org.



Cascade Policy Institute's GED Bill Is a Bipartisan Win for Students

By Kathryn Hickok



In 2021, the Oregon legislature passed SB 744, allowing students to graduate from high school without demonstrating proficiency in reading, writing, or math. By removing academic standards, SB 744 turned diplomas into participation trophies. Oregon isn't the only state with this problem. During the pandemic, many states relaxed graduation requirements, making a diploma an unreliable guarantor of proficiency.

Cascade Policy Institute responded by developing an option that would give both successful and struggling students an alternative to a system that is failing them: Turn the little-used GED process into a pathway to demonstrate proficiency and graduate early.

General Educational Development tests are a group of standardized exams that measure proficiency in science, mathematics, social studies, and language arts. When passed, the GED provides certification that the test-taker meets high school graduate-level academic skills. Higher scores demonstrate college readiness, and even higher scores can qualify students for college credit.

While the privately-run GED Testing Service requires test-takers to be at least 16 years old, Oregon law has required that test-takers be 18. People as young as 16 could sit for the GED only in limited circumstances – if they had dropped out of high school, were married or emancipated minors, or were in juvenile detention.

Cascade secured bipartisan sponsorship and support for a bill – HB 3068 – that removed these restrictions. During the 2023 Oregon legislative session, HB 3068 passed both the House and the Senate with unanimous or near-unanimous votes. On August 1, Governor Tina Kotek signed HB 3068 into law.

This means that 11th and 12th graders (with parents' permission) may earn a GED under the age of 18, without having to drop out of high school first. Earning a GED while still enrolled in school provides students with a low-risk option to demonstrate academic proficiency and move on to higher education or employment.

Cascade's GED bill will make a meaningful difference to many students who are looking for a way to move forward more quickly toward college or a career. Students with the motivation to succeed should have an opportunity to demonstrate academic competency; finish high school earlier; and pursue college, vocational school, or employment with an objective credential that employers and colleges respect. Cascade's GED bill is an example of a common-sense policy solution that earned strong bipartisan support.

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