

The Progressive Case for Educational Pluralism

Ashley Berner | May 2024

Key Points

- Educational pluralism is an approach to the structure and content of school systems in which the government funds and regulates, but does not exclusively deliver, public education.
- In North America today, support for educational pluralism (or, in US parlance, “choice and academic accountability”) is often perceived as a right-of-centre position. A close examination of the record, however, suggests that this characterization misses the mark.
- Since the 1960s, progressives have played a key role in championing the principles and practices of educational pluralism. From law professors to civil rights activists, progressives have resisted the dominance of the district-school-only model as an oppressive form of individualism, unresponsive to the needs of cultural minorities, and failing to provide academic rigor and depth for all.
- At the same time, progressives have argued positively for the rights of low-income parents to select their children’s educational pathways, the equalizing value of a liberal arts curriculum, and the benefits of clear moral alignment between family and school to a child’s development.
- This paper highlights key elements of the progressive case for educational pluralism and reminds North Americans of the complex arguments and cross-partisan alliances that have supported a movement toward a more diversified school system and a high-quality curriculum.

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