

The AFCON Sentinel

Newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska

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Academic Boycotts

David Moshman
AFCON Policy Coordinator

My policy report at the September meeting of the AFCON Board of Directors focused on the issue of academic boycotts, a topic about which there has been intense national discussion since a controversial recent change in the position of the American Association of University Professors. Although many critics of the new policy have denounced it as a betrayal of AAUP's century-long support of academic freedom, I suggested they are hyperventilating about what is really a relatively modest change.

AAUP's old policy was that academic boycotts are always wrong. Under its new policy, academic boycotts of all colleges in a country because of objections to actions of that country are still always wrong, as are boycotts that target individuals. What has changed is that, under the new policy, faculty may reasonably institute or support an academic boycott aimed at a particular institution that violates academic freedom or the fundamental rights on which it depends. Deciding to support a particular boycott is now deemed a legitimate exercise of academic freedom in defense of academic freedom.

Thus, contrary to what some of its critics (and some of its supporters) suggest, AAUP has not endorsed boycotts. It has simply

moved to a neutral position on some kinds of boycotts while continuing to oppose others.

The issue of boycotts has been particularly sensitive due to an ongoing campaign, initiated in 2004, to boycott all Israeli universities because of Israel's ongoing oppression of Palestinians, which many believe has now escalated to genocide. This was the reason AAUP adopted its original policy in 2006. But the revised policy does not change AAUP's opposition to country-based boycotts.

AFCON has not taken any position on academic boycotts but we would be interested in hearing about any relevant cases or issues that arise in Nebraska. My personal position, which is largely consistent with AAUP's revised policy, can be found in this 2016 post:

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/boycott-hewlett-packard-n_b_12186556

I argue in the post that some boycotts, including some academic boycotts, may be justifiable, but add this reminder and warning: "An academic boycott of all colleges and universities in an entire country...removes its targets from the international academic community for reasons beyond their control. Such boycotts threaten the important ideal of academia as an autonomous international community that transcends national divisions."

For more on this issue, see the links below.

AAUP's Revised Policy on Boycotts

<https://www.aaup.org/report/statement-academic-boycotts>

Articles about the new policy

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/08/12/aaup-ends-two-decade-opposition-academic-boycotts>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/08/16/aaup-faces-criticism-reversal-academic-boycotts>

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-the-aaup-changed-its-stance-on-academic-boycotts>

Critiques of the new policy

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-aaup-abandons-academic-freedom>

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-aaups-incoherent-new-boycott-policy>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2024/09/12/academic-boycotts-cannot-be-come-new-normal-opinion>

<https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/the-review/2024-09-16>

Defenses of the new policy

<https://academeblog.org/2024/08/20/the-academic-and-cultural-boycott-of-israel-as-a-defense-of-academic-freedom/>

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-aaup-is-right-supporting-boycotts-is-academic-freedom>

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-aaup-has-always-defended-academic-freedom-we-still-do>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2024/08/29/defense-aaups-statement-boycotts-opinion>

David Moshman is a professor emeritus of educational psychology at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where he taught, studied, and wrote about human reasoning, rationality, and development, including the role of intellectual freedom in education.



Note from the President

Wyatt Packard

“Fund students, not systems.” This is a phrase that is heard often by politicians while they push for the creation or expansion of state-funded school voucher programs. And boy, does it sound good in theory. After all, who wants to support a faceless, bureaucratic system? It is the students we all care about, right? But this phrase in action is actually much more nefarious. In reality, it is the message behind a movement that seeks to defund public education, resulting in discrimination, negative learning outcomes, and harm to our society.

Many proponents of school voucher programs, like those who support Nebraska’s LB1402 (which provides \$10 million dollars of state taxpayer money to private schools), say that this is about providing more equitable access to school choice. But private school or homeschooling is a choice available to all Nebraska parents already. Private schools are driven by the need to attain income. That is a big difference between private and public institutions. Using taxpayer funds to subsidize these organizations is defunding the public schools that our communities rely on. An argument for this is “competition.” The idea that by shifting K-12 education to a market-driven business model, private schools will compete for students (and their share of taxpayer funds). But that not only defunds public schools, but also creates a culture where students and education are an afterthought, because why pay for quality teachers and materials when the cheapest options will do. Defunding public schools also may result in the closure of rural schools and a lack of any private school option because rural education is not profitable. Meaning parents will have to drive hours each day to take their child to school or that child will not receive a quality education.

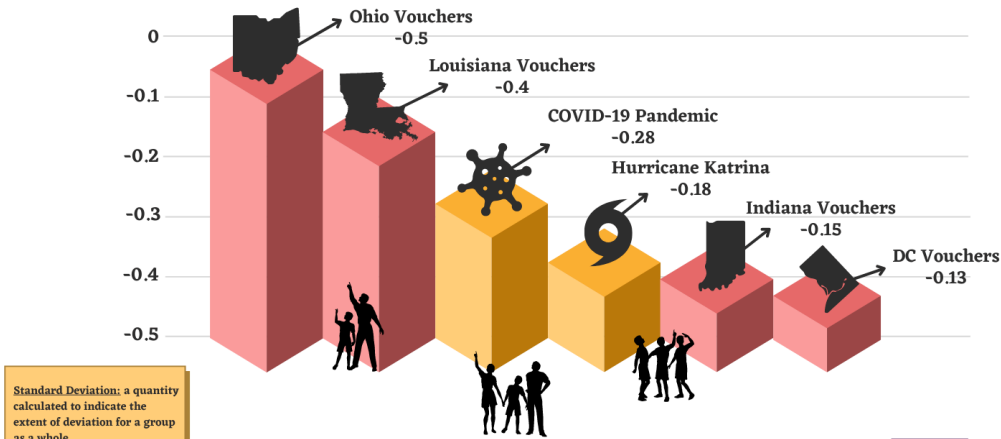
Private schools are also free to discriminate against students according to their institutional beliefs. This means that LGBTQ students and those who do not believe in the same religion can be refused or harassed. We take for granted the fact that public schools have been a driving force for coming together with people who may look or speak in a way that is different from ourselves. Being in school allows us to make friends with people in our community we would otherwise never know, and participating in this throughout adolescence is incredible practice for entering the community as a whole as an adult.

The [Economic Policy Institute \(2023\)](#) shares findings that, far from being the answer to making your child competitive, vouchers worsen student academic outcomes. The National Coalition for Public Education also reports this, finding that in some states, vouchers had a bigger negative impact on student outcomes than COVID-19 and Hurricane Katrina. The fact is, vouchers are a huge benefit to those already attending private schools. But for public school students, they are a means to defund public education. Because what happens when public schools fail as a result of being defunded while costs for subpar voucher programs soar? The end of public schooling in America.

Public K-12 education matters because as a society, we believe that people should have the knowledge to make informed decisions and not be manipulated by those in power. We also believe that education can be a pathway out of poverty and understand that without it, only those who are wealthy and elite can afford the education required for the best jobs and will continue to earn the most money. In a country that values hard work, public education is the foundation on which individuals can grow. We must ask ourselves if we want to risk that because a small minority of people think they know better. Public schools do so much, and of course you want more. That is okay! But the answer to wanting to improve public education is not to blow it up. It is to invest.

I recommend the book *The Education Wars: A Citizen's Guide and Defense Manual* by Jennifer C. Berkshire and Jack Schneider if you would like to explore this topic further.

Voucher Impacts on Student Outcomes As Harmful as Natural Disasters (Measured in Standard Deviation)



NCPE National Coalition for PUBLIC EDUCATION

Sources: <https://edhammattests.org/ohio/research/evaluation-ohio-choice-scholarship-program-selection-competition-and-performance/>

<https://www.acsweb.org/articles/74d-10-1057/app.20160634>

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up/>

https://online.library.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pam.22089?casa_token=3W1M9AxytAAAAA:3ARtA1n0c7aV7jyHf-EDQV7yqMfzXtH2pAYWU3WCN8K4_28p-1-6d4cVY_K3KCAp5fmVL_yBSE

<https://ies.ed.gov/nces/pubs/2008/023/participation.asp>

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/highly-negative-impacts-vouchers/>

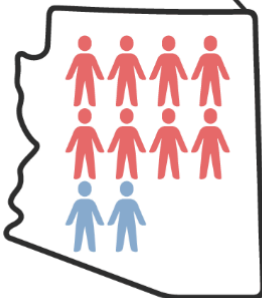
<https://www.nber.org/papers/w24428>

<https://cepr.org/voices/columns/replicating-successful-charter-schools-boston>

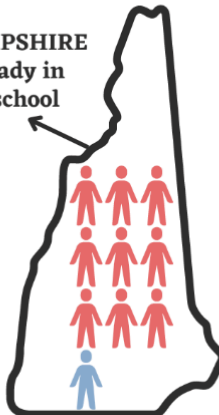
Who benefits from school vouchers?

The majority of voucher users in these states have never attended a public school. Vouchers subsidize tuition for students who already attend pricey private schools.

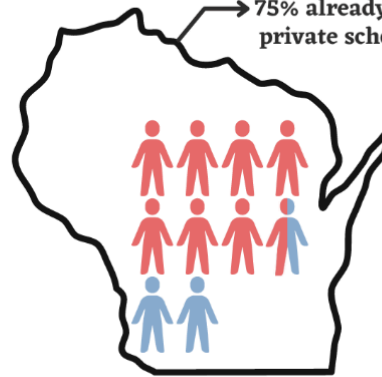
ARIZONA
80% already in private school



NEW HAMPSHIRE
89% already in private school



WISCONSIN
75% already in private school



Sources: <https://www.ascentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2022/10/07/arizona-school-vouchers-nearly-22-500-applications-pour-so-far/8208504001/>

<https://www.hampshirebulletin.com/briefs/most-education-freedom-account-recipients-not-leaving-public-schools-department-says/>

<https://wechive.com/news/education/76-of-state-voucher-program-applicants-already-attend-private-school-59974321c-20190701.html/>

NCPE National Coalition for PUBLIC EDUCATION

Law for Librarians: ALA Prepares a New Cadre of Trainers

Wyatt Packard

From May 31st-June 2nd, a group of over 90 library professionals from across the country gathered in Rosemont, IL to discuss the law. Over the weekend, ALA leaders and guest presenters discussed First Amendment case law, best privacy practices, CIPA, copyright laws, and how state library associations and groups can work with ALA to advocate for libraries.

Three members of the Nebraska Library Association's Advocacy Committee were selected for this "train the trainers" program, including Christine Haeffner, Jeralynn Moser, and Wyatt Packard. This group looks forward to sharing the information from this program with Nebraska library workers by leading new training sessions and continuing to expand the coalition of organizations advocating for intellectual freedom and the importance of libraries.

As always, if you are facing challenges to library resources or would like to discuss an issue related to access, advocacy, or privacy, please contact the Nebraska Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Round Table by email at nebraskaintellectualfreedom@gmail.com.

SAVE THE DATE

**AAUP NE and AFCON
2024 Annual Meetings**

Nebraska Union

11/9/2024

9 AM - 1 PM

9-9:30 Registration and Welcome

9:30-10:30 Keynote

Presented by Isaac Kamola, author of "[Manufacturing Backlash: Right-Wing Think Tanks and Legislative Attacks on Higher Education, 2021–2023](#)"

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12 Panel on advocacy

Jeralynn Moser - NSLA President

Chris Haeffner - NSLA Past President

Mindy Rush Chipman - ACLU NE Director

12-1 Business meetings

The meeting will be live streamed for those unable to attend in person.

Tom Black
1935-2024



We are sorry to note the passing of Tom Black, who defended intellectual freedom in many educational contexts and in connection with a variety of professional organizations, including AFCON.

Born in Shenandoah, Iowa, Tom attended Iowa State and the University of Iowa, majoring in social studies and English. He participated in and was a strong supporter of the 1950's-1960's Civil Rights Movement. In West Point, Nebraska, he taught American history, sociology, and economics for 34 years, maintaining a “free speech classroom” that encouraged open discussion. He served on the Nebraska State Education Association Board of Directors for twenty years and on the NEA's national Board of Directors for five years. He was later active in NSEA-Retired, including editorship of its publications.

Within AFCON, Tom is remembered for founding the *AFCON Sentinel* and editing it for over 18 years. Prior to his taking on that task, AFCON had published newsletters sporadically—a total of 13 issues in its first eight years (1988-1995). Under Tom's editorship, AFCON began publishing a quarterly newsletter beginning in March 1997 and it became known as *The Sentinel* beginning in June 1998. Tom continued to edit *The Sentinel* through June 2015 and made sure electronic copies were preserved even before it went to an all-electronic format distributed by email. You can now find copies of every issue since March 1997, the year Tom became editor, on the AFCON website.

In recognition of his work, Tom received AFCON's annual Academic Freedom Award in fall 2012 and was one of the first recipients of its Lifetime Achievement Award in fall 2023.

<https://minnickfuneralserviceinc.com/book-of-memories/5467475/Black-Thomas/index.php>

--Dave Moshman

AFCON

www.academicfreedomnebraska.org

The Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska was founded in 1988 to promote intellectual freedom in Nebraska education and research, including freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas.

AFCON Board of Directors

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Peggy Adair, Secretary and Legislative Liaison

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Todd Schlechte, Webmaster

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Shee Covarrubias

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Nancy Comer

Robert Haller

Laurie Thomas Lee

Regina Werum

From the AFCON Constitution, Article I:

The purpose of AFCON shall be to promote academic freedom in Nebraska, defined as intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. This includes freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas. In pursuit of this general goal, AFCON shall:

1. Support application of the First Amendment in academic contexts, including schools, colleges, universities, and libraries.
2. Educate Nebraskans in and out of Academic settings, citizens and professionals, parents and students about the meaning and value of intellectual freedom, intellectual diversity, mutual respect, open communication, and uninhibited pursuit of knowledge, including the role of these ideals in academic contexts and in democratic self government.
3. Assist students, teachers, librarians, researchers, and others confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or suppression of information or ideas in academic settings.
4. Act as liaison among groups in the State of Nebraska that support academic freedom.

JOIN OR RENEW

Rod Wagner, Treasurer

If you are interested in defending and expanding academic freedom in Nebraska, we welcome you or your organization as a member of AFCON. Annual dues are \$120 for institutions, \$15 for individuals, and \$5 for students. Individual life memberships are available for \$150. You can pay by visiting our website at <https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/>

Memberships and donations can also be made by check (payable to AFCON). Send check to AFCON Treasurer, 3901 S. 27th St.,#47, Lincoln NE 68502.

Organizational members are entitled to a representative on the AFCON board. We also have at-large board members. You may express your interest to the president to be considered for appointment to the board.

Local Links

Governor appoints ex-school board member recalled over book ban push to Nebraska's library board

<https://apnews.com/article/book-ban-nebraska-library-board-nominee-2c2b91e29985ada67e00632ca45fc43d>

Group to protest Nebraska Library Commission appointment during public comment

<https://www.wowt.com/2024/09/05/group-protest-nebraska-library-commission-appointment-during-public-comment/>

National Links

American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana files lawsuit against Indiana University

https://www.wfft.com/news/local/american-civil-liberties-union-of-indiana-files-lawsuit-against-indiana-university/article_f8c12b1a-6716-11ef-86bc-9b915ca8baf3.html

Academic Freedom Is more important now than ever

<https://time.com/6969851/academic-freedom-is-more-important-than-ever-now/>

Florida Argues It Could Stop Professors From Criticizing Governor

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/06/21/fla-argues-it-could-stop-professors-criticizing>

Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska
Board of Directors Meeting
Via Videoconference
September 14, 2024

Present:

John Bender, representing UNL Faculty Senate
Patty Bick, representing UNO Faculty Senate
Bob Haller, chief baker, director at large
Laurie Thomas Lee, representing American Civil Liberties Union, Nebraska
Dave Moshman, policy coordinator
Wyatt Packard, president, representing Nebraska Library Association
Todd Schlechte, webmaster, director at large
Vicki Wood, director at large

MINUTES

President Wyatt Packard called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

AGENDA: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Wood, to approve the agenda. Motion carried on a voice vote.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Lee, to approve the minutes of the AFCON board meeting held on July 13, 2024. Motion carried on a voice vote.

TREASURER'S REPORT: The members present reviewed the treasurer's report prepared by Wagner. Balance on hand as of September 13, 2024, is \$3,209.04.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Wood shared information that there are concerns that there may be future attempts to restrict the availability of information in library databases. Discussion regarding potential for special session to change how Nebraska awards electoral college votes. Discussion regarding news reports on Nebraska Library Commission appointments.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT: Members reviewed the report submitted by Comer.

POLICY COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Moshman shared information and answered questions regarding academic boycotts and AAUP's change to a neutral position on academic boycotts against universities with objectionable policies.

DEVELOPMENT OF A SEARCHABLE ONLINE REPOSITORY OF NEBRASKA ACADEMIC FREEDOM CASES: Moshman presented his idea to develop a searchable online database with academic freedom cases in Nebraska with the technology offered pro bono by his wife and her company. Moshman shared his progress on going through prior issues of *The Sentinel* and is up to 2004. Discussion regarding potential uses and what constitutes a case. The group was excited for this project.

PRESIDENT’S REPORT: Discussion regarding the need to appoint a nominating committee to find a list of officer candidates for 2025. Packard sought volunteers and Bender, Schlechte and Wood volunteered and Packard confirmed. Further discussion regarding typical business meeting agenda items.

ANNUAL MEETING: Packard provided an update and progress made to recruit panelists for the annual meeting.

SENTINEL: Wood reported that the deadline for articles to be published in the October edition of the *Sentinel* is September 24, 2024.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:

Nebraska Library Association – Packard shared that the 2024 NLA Annual Conference will be in October and registration is open.

There being no further business, the AFCON board meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Wyatt Packard, President

The AFCON Sentinel is the newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska, published bimonthly in February, April, June, August, October, and December. Unless otherwise indicated, articles represent the views of the authors. All issues of the AFCON Sentinel are available here:
<https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/the-sentinel.html>

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