Twitter Thread by Alex Seitz-Wald

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NEW w/@akarl_smith: Republicans see an opportunity to begin winning back the suburban voters they lost under Donald Trump's presidency by capitalizing on widespread frustration with pandemic life and directing it at an old enemy: Teachers

@akarl_smith New NRCC Tom Emmer told staff as soon as he took over to go all in on schools: "It's the teachers unions that want to keep the schools closed. Dems are ignoring the science, and they're standing with their special-interest donors instead of the students." https://t.co/LOiINBsGvi

@akarl_smith Going after public sector unions is a throwback to the last time the GOP was locked out of power in DC in 2009/2010 and it's a message that every faction in the party can get behind -- with the potential for crossover appeal to indies and some Dems.

@akarl_smith The politics have changed since circa 2009, when the school reform movement was at its height w/ broad bipartisan support, including from the Obama admin.

Now, support for unions is at a nearly 20-year high and teachers unions favorability has gone up a bit during Covid, BUT...

@akarl_smith But the frustration over shuttered schools is real and Republicans think they can channel that anger into a grassroots uprising to drive a wedge between suburban voters and the Democratic Party.

"This is the suburban-parent revolt," said Corry Bliss.

@akarl_smith Dems say this won't work because schools will (hopefully) be open before voters vote.

AFT Pres. @rweingarten told me it's "a reckless and irresponsible exploitation of the fear and frustration that everybody feels right now" and attempt to "deflect blame" from Trump+GOP.

@akarl_smith @rweingarten The first real test will be in #VAGov, where GOPer @petesnyder has centered his campaign around "#OpenOurSchools."

"I think Virginia is the beginning of the nationwide earthquake on this," he told @akarl_smith.

It's not "conservative red meat,"he said just "common sense."

@akarl_smith @rweingarten @petesnyder A lot more, with polling data, more voices and other perspective in here: https://t.co/LOiINBsGvi

@akarl_smith @rweingarten @petesnyder P.S. Politics is ALREADY determining school openings more than science, according to a recent study from @BrownUniversity's @AnnenbergInst, which found correlation btwn in-person learning and the district's pres. vote share + strength of teachers unions.

https://t.co/qAdW4QqXyH

Politics, Markets, and Pandemics: Public Education's Response to COVID-19

Michael T. Hartney, Leslie K. Finger

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The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity to examine how local governments respond to a public health crisis amid high levels of partisan polarization and an increasing tendency for local issues to become nationalized. As an arena that has, in recent years, been relatively separate from national partisan divides, public schools provide a useful window into these dynamics. Leveraging the fact that all of the nation's school districts had to adopt a reopening plan for the fall, we test what factors best predict whether a district chose to return students to the classroom or educate them remotely. Contrary to the conventional understanding of school districts as localized and non-partisan actors, we find evidence that politics, far more than science, shaped school district decision-making. Mass partisanship and teacher union strength best explain how school boards approached reopening. Additionally, we find evidence that districts are sensitive to the threat of private school exit. Districts located in counties with a larger number of Catholic schools were less likely to shut down and more likely to return to in-person learning. These findings have important implications for our understanding of education policy and the functioning of American local governments.

Keywords: Local politics, education policy, COVID-19

Education level: K-12 Education