

# Schools and the Decline of the West

Blake McBride

June 14, 2026

## Abstract

This excerpt from *Life Explained* argues that modern education is a primary driver of long-term cultural and political imbalance in the West. While government, business, and media are constrained by voters, markets, and audiences, schools and universities operate with comparatively weak external accountability. Because educational institutions influence children and young adults during formative stages, ideological drift within them can shape the assumptions, values, and political outlook of future voters, professionals, leaders, and teachers. The essay contends that this dynamic makes education uniquely powerful among major institutions: it does not merely reflect cultural change, but helps produce and reproduce it across generations. The excerpt further argues that restoring balance requires structural reforms aimed at increasing accountability, limiting ideological instruction, and returning schools to their core mission of teaching knowledge, skills, reasoning, and open inquiry.

Although the public in the United States remains roughly divided between left and right political views, most major institutions lean decisively left. The tilt is unmistakable and shows up across:

- Government
- Big Business and Big Tech
- The Media
- Schools and Universities

The natural question is: why?

Government officials respond to voters. If elected leaders lean left over time, it is because enough of the electorate supports those policies or candidates. Politicians who stray too far from public sentiment face electoral consequences and are voted out. There are consequences.

Corporations respond to market pressures. Their core drive is profit. They adapt public positions, hiring practices, and messaging to align with customers, regulators, investors, and employees. Misjudge the market severely, and they pay financially. There are consequences.

The media operates under competitive pressure. It must attract audiences, readers, and advertisers to survive. Fail to resonate, and it loses relevance and revenue. While journalists often share certain cultural assumptions, media outlets endure only by maintaining enough market appeal. There are consequences.

Schools and universities are fundamentally different. Public schools and higher education institutions do not face the same profit discipline or electoral accountability. They are funded largely through taxation, government-backed loans, or endowments. Enrollment is often effectively guaranteed. Tenure shields faculty, unions protect employment, and curriculum decisions are frequently insulated from direct parental, voter, or market oversight.

Unlike politicians, teachers and professors are rarely voted out for their views. Unlike businesses, schools do not go bankrupt from ideological imbalance. Unlike media outlets, schools do not lose

subscribers or advertisers when parents or the public disagree with the worldview being taught. In many cases, parents have limited real alternatives.

This near-absence of meaningful consequences is the key difference.

Politicians, businesses, and media are all consequence-driven. When ideological drift occurs in these arenas, external forces—voters, markets, audiences—push back hard and often quickly. Missteps lead to lost elections, lost profits, and lost revenue. The incentives enforce moderation, adaptation, and alignment with broader realities.

Education, by contrast, operates with far weaker consequences. Ideological drift can persist for decades, even generations, with little external correction. The system is insulated from the usual pressures that keep other institutions in check. As a result, education becomes far more ideologically driven—more prone to unchecked drift toward one side—because there are fewer real-world penalties for imbalance.

But the lack of consequences is only part of the problem.

Schools also exist in an environment unusually favorable to unrealistic thinking. Teachers and professors are often disconnected from the direct consequences that govern most real-world work. In ordinary work, a person's ideas are constantly tested against profit, loss, competition, customer satisfaction, productivity, and performance. In schools, especially public ones, those pressures are far weaker. This allows high ideals, abstractions, and theories to flourish without being forced into constant contact with reality.

Many of these ideals sound noble. Some may even be partly true. But when they are not disciplined by real-world consequences, they tend to become exaggerated, oversimplified, and overconfident. The result is a style of thinking that sounds compassionate and enlightened while being poorly grounded in how the world actually works.

There is also the problem of the audience. Schools operate with a largely captive audience. Children must attend. They are young, impressionable, and still forming their basic model of the world. They are not yet equipped to critically evaluate much of what is presented to them, especially when it is presented by an adult authority figure.

This makes the school environment uniquely powerful. The teacher is not merely offering ideas to independent adults who may accept or reject them. The teacher is presenting them to children at the very stage of life when their assumptions about morality, authority, society, economics, and politics are still being formed.

Another factor makes this even more powerful. Teachers are more educated than the children they teach and often more educated than many people in the surrounding community. Because of this, they often develop a false sense of superiority regarding the truth of their conclusions, and the public often grants them more trust than is warranted.

Education does not automatically produce wisdom. Nor does it guarantee critical thinking. As discussed elsewhere, education often increases confidence more than accuracy, and human beings are naturally motivated to protect their identity, status, and worldview. Teachers are no exception. But because they are educated, and because society treats them as authorities, their confidence can become exaggerated. They may come to believe not merely that they have opinions, but that their opinions are obviously correct and morally elevated.

Thus, you have a dangerous combination:

- weak consequences
- high ideals disconnected from real work realities
- a captive audience
- children at an impressionable age
- authority figures with unwarranted confidence in their own conclusions

That combination is highly effective at transmitting ideology.

Faculty political affiliation data in many universities reveal dramatic imbalance in numerous disciplines, particularly in education, humanities, and social sciences. In education departments and teacher training programs especially, the leftward skew is pronounced, influencing hiring decisions, curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and the norms transmitted to future teachers.

Teacher training programs, housed within these heavily left-leaning education departments, reproduce and amplify their own assumptions. Prospective teachers are immersed in an environment where certain ideological perspectives dominate while alternatives are marginalized or absent. The cycle perpetuates itself: graduates enter classrooms carrying those assumptions, influence the next generation, and later return as faculty or administrators, further entrenching the imbalance.

Students shaped by this system go on to become voters, staff media organizations, enter government bureaucracies, lead corporations, and—most importantly—train the next wave of teachers. The institutional leftward tilt becomes self-reinforcing across society.

In this sense, education is not merely one left-leaning institution among many. It is the primary source from which society draws its citizenry, assumptions, and cultural framing. If the schools lean heavily in one direction, the rest of society will increasingly do the same.

On the other hand, if education remained strictly focused on core skills—literacy, numeracy, rigorous science, and genuine critical thinking—while fairly presenting competing ideas and encouraging open debate, political balance in broader society would tend to stabilize over time. But when education shifts toward ideological instruction rather than neutral intellectual training, long-term societal imbalance becomes inevitable.

Government responds to voters. Business responds to markets. Media responds to audiences.

Schools, as presently structured, largely do not respond to any comparable corrective force.

That is why education is the root of the problem.

## School Accountability

If schools are the root of long-term political drift, then reforming schools is essential to restoring balance.

The problem is not that teachers are human. It is not that they hold opinions. Every human does. The problem is structural insulation from accountability combined with influence over impressionable minds.

Several reforms would significantly reduce ideological drift while preserving academic freedom and educational quality.

### 1. Eliminate Tenure

In most professions, continued employment depends on continued performance.

Doctors must maintain standards. Lawyers must maintain standards. Engineers must maintain standards. Business professionals must maintain standards. Poor performance, misconduct, or incompetence eventually results in termination.

Tenure dramatically weakens this accountability. While originally designed to protect academic freedom, it has evolved into long-term employment protection that is extremely difficult to revoke—even when performance declines or ideological activism overtakes instruction.

No other major profession grants near-permanent employment after a probationary period.

Academic freedom does not require lifetime insulation from consequences. It requires protection from political retaliation. Those are not the same thing.

Employment should require ongoing demonstration of competence, professionalism, and adherence to institutional mission. Schools should operate under the same expectation of quality and accountability that applies elsewhere in society. Tenure, as currently structured, reduces that expectation.

## 2. Restrict Schools to Facts and Skills

Except in explicitly religious institutions, schools should be legally required to focus on:

- Factual knowledge
- Analytical skills
- Literacy and numeracy
- Scientific method
- Logical reasoning
- Genuine critical thinking

Schools should not function as moral authorities or ideological instructors. Morality, values, and worldview formation are primarily the responsibility of families.

Public schools, in particular, are funded by citizens of widely differing beliefs. They do not have the moral authority to advance contested political or social doctrines as truth.

This does not mean history cannot be taught. It does not mean political systems cannot be examined. It means they must be presented factually and fairly, with competing interpretations openly acknowledged.

When teachers move from explaining ideas to promoting them, they cross a line. Repeated violation of this boundary should carry significant consequences.

## 3. Eliminate School Unions

Teachers, like all professionals, deserve fair compensation and safe working conditions. That is not the issue.

The issue arises when the employees of a public institution collectively gain the power to influence or effectively control the rules under which they operate.

Public school unions often negotiate not only wages and benefits, but also classroom policy, disciplinary standards, curriculum influence, hiring practices, and termination procedures. In many districts, removing an underperforming teacher becomes so difficult and expensive that administrators avoid doing it altogether.

This reverses accountability.

Public schools are funded by taxpayers and exist to serve students and families. They should

be governed by clear rules set through elected representation and transparent administration—not by collective bargaining groups whose primary obligation is to their members.

In most professions, the employee follows the institutional rules. In public education, unions frequently shape those rules.

When the regulated group gains structural power over the regulatory framework, reform becomes nearly impossible.

If schools are to regain balance and accountability, governance must be restored to the public through elected boards and administrators—not negotiated through union leverage.

#### 4. Limit Institutional Endowments and Enforce Neutrality

Large endowments create another form of insulation.

When a university accumulates tens of billions of dollars in invested assets, it becomes economically untouchable. Market discipline weakens. Public accountability weakens. Alumni and donor influence often replaces community oversight.

Institutions that hold endowments many multiples of their annual operating budgets are no longer operating primarily as educational services. They function as massive investment funds that happen to run a school on the side.

A reasonable reserve is prudent. Institutions should maintain financial stability and protection against downturns. However, once an endowment exceeds a rational multiple of annual expenses—five times annual operating costs, for example—it no longer serves stability. It serves insulation.

At that point, the institution becomes largely immune from consequence. It can ignore public concern, raise tuition without fear, promote particular ideological frameworks, and suppress competing legal viewpoints without meaningful financial risk.

That is incompatible with tax-exempt status.

Tax exemption is not a right. It is a public subsidy granted in exchange for serving the public good. If a school uses its protected status to promote a particular political ideology or to suppress another legal ideology, it ceases to function as a neutral educational institution and begins functioning as a political actor.

Political actors should not receive tax-exempt protection.

Any educational institution found to be systematically promoting a particular political ideology or suppressing lawful opposing viewpoints should lose its tax-exempt status. Public subsidy requires neutrality.

Endowment limits must also carry enforcement.

If an institution's endowment exceeds five times its annual operating expenses, the excess portion should be subject to a significant annual tax—at least 20% per year—until the endowment returns to a reasonable level.

This accomplishes several things:

- Prevents indefinite financial insulation from public accountability
- Encourages reduction of tuition and expansion of scholarships
- Discourages ideological entrenchment protected by financial immunity
- Returns excess capital into broader societal circulation rather than allowing it to accumulate indefinitely inside insulated institutions

An educational institution should exist to educate—not to accumulate permanent, untouchable financial power.

When schools become both ideologically insulated and economically immune from consequence, drift is inevitable.

Structural imbalance cannot correct itself under those conditions.