

# Mid-Western Educational Research Association Conference 2024

## October 16-19

### Graduate Hotels Cincinnati



#### Conference Theme: Can Research Shape the Future of Public Education?

It would be difficult to recall a time when the mission of public education was in greater jeopardy than it is now. Public schools have come to expect attacks on student achievement, international competitiveness, or teacher quality with their accompanying changes in curriculum, teaching methods and teacher preparation standards. While questions of the purpose of public schooling have been raised over the years, resulting in thought-provoking debates between some of our most brilliant scholars and advocates, what is occurring now is a more profound, existential threat to the institution itself. Any attempt to fundamentally redefine the schools should be considered in light of Chief Justice Warren’s reminder in the *Brown vs Board* decision that public education is “perhaps the most important function of state and local governments” and the “very foundation of good citizenship”.

Among the threats to public education are declining enrollments, a lack of interest in becoming teachers, systematic attempts by special interest groups to shape local school boards and a decline in the overall trust in public schools. Perhaps the most seismic impact on the foundation of public education is the radical shift in how the purpose of the institution is being redefined. Historically, the purpose of a tax-supported education was informed by founders such as Jefferson, Paine and Rush who emphasized the common good and common cultural identity. Those assumptions are turned on their head in a cultural climate where one governor recently claimed that any education paid for by a taxpayer is public education. That sentiment led to more than 10 states passing school voucher programs in the first half of 2023 alone. With no indication that the current trend will slow we would do well to recall Plato’s argument that in order to talk about the good life, we have to talk about the good society; and in order to talk about the good society, we have to talk about the kind of education that will bring that society into existence and sustain it. And, if public education becomes any education funded by public dollars, what will that mean for the future of public education – and democracy?

Of particular interest to the conference theme, we seek proposals that address the most immediate advocacy needs:

- Alternative purposes and definitions of public education
- Public perceptions of public schools
- Rebuilding trust in public schools
- State policies regarding school choice/vouchers
- Historical perspectives on public education
- School choice and democratic society

What research is needed to support the traditional roles of public education? Is there evidence that public education is fulfilling its traditional mission? What is the role of public accountability in a context of private choice? What is the role of teacher education in a school choice environment? Is school choice really a treat to public education?

Please join us at the 2024 MWERA Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, to explore these issues and more!

*\*As always proposals, **which are due May 1st**, will be accepted that do not match the conference theme. Visit [mwera.org](http://mwera.org) to apply.*