

Jason Altmire ([00:05](#)):

Hello and welcome to another edition of Career Education Report. I am Jason Altmire. Today, we have Bianca Quilantan with us. She is with Politico, and she is a higher education and education writer. She writes the morning newsletter that so many people read in DC and across the country that drives the attention on what is going to be the education focus of the day or the week.

([00:32](#)):

She wrote recently about the presidential election and in particular the education stances of Governor DeSantis in Florida. I wanted to bring her on to talk more about that, but also about higher education generally, because people are starting to pay more attention to the presidential race and what the candidates are saying. Bianca, thank you very much for being with us.

Bianca Quilantan ([00:57](#)):

Thanks for having me, Jason.

Jason Altmire ([00:59](#)):

I wanted to ask first, you do have responsibility for at least part of, maybe all of that morning newsletter that Politico does. How does that come to be? Because so many people read that in the morning. What time do you have to get up to do that, and how do you determine which stories you're going to focus on for each day?

Bianca Quilantan ([01:22](#)):

I will say every week is very different and every week can be a challenge sometimes to figure out what you want to write, especially during recess time. Send stuff my way this August. But I think the way that we look at our newsletter is that we want it to be the most beneficial for you, for who is reading it, so you can prepare your week and know what is coming down the pipeline. Last week my colleague wrote about Pell Grants because we thought we were going to have that jobs hearing.

([01:55](#)):

We're really focused on trying to get you the latest news so you can prepare for your week. But to be honest, it comes from different ways. I have tons of coffees every week, so that coffee invitation is very much real if you reach out to me, and sometimes through conversations you find out what is most interesting to the people that are reading what we have. That's how I get most of the news in addition to the traditional scoops that you get from being on the Hill consistently or being at the department consistently.

Jason Altmire ([02:27](#)):

You have a team at Politico that works. We've actually had Michael Stratford on the podcast and just do an amazing job of keeping track of all the issues that are out there, often scooping everybody else and getting things before other media outlets get them. We are definitely fans of the work that you do in passing along that information.

([02:48](#)):

I wanted to talk a little bit, given that we are heading now into the debate season, and maybe not quite the home stretch, but maybe the beginning of the home stretch before things start to really matter in the presidential race with debates and candidates qualifying and so forth. You wrote about Governor DeSantis, who, of course, at one time was the hot commodity in the presidential race and has cooled off a little bit, but is still by most polls running at least second.

[\(03:20\)](#):

He is focused on education quite a bit, both in his job as governor in Florida, but also his rhetoric as a presidential candidate. You wrote one of what I think is the most detailed and I think interesting pieces related to his stand on education. I would just start by saying why does he focus so much on the issues of education and do you feel like it's working for him?

Bianca Quilantan [\(03:46\)](#):

I think that this is what really propelled him into the national spotlight. The pandemic really proved that education needed a revamp, right? He really honed in on that and a lot of people really gravitated towards that. When you create your name as someone who is good on education, he likes to call himself an education governor, why not continue? I think that he's really used his policies in his state to create a blueprint or a roadmap for several other conservative states to pass these conservative policies, and he's been successful at it throughout his two terms.

Jason Altmire [\(04:26\)](#):

You referenced the effectiveness that the issue had with Governor Youngkin in Virginia in his first race in 2019. Do you think that Governor DeSantis is modeling his campaign after that expecting the same type of results?

Bianca Quilantan [\(04:43\)](#):

I think it's partly modeling, but also they know what animates voters. If you think about it, everybody gets some sort of education. Parents were really interested in learning more about what their kids were learning in the classroom throughout the pandemic. Some were content and some weren't as we've seen this past two years, three years. He's really honed in on those who were discontent with their kids' schooling.

[\(05:11\)](#):

I think that's why he's really added it to his playbook as being an education governor, and he's also really focused on higher ed too. He had several policies this year in his legislative session that he's taken credit for that he's hoping to use on the campaign trail.

Jason Altmire [\(05:27\)](#):

We're going to definitely focus on the higher ed points. I think in Florida it's important for context to understand that a lot of this has to do also with his response to COVID, because a big part of his cache was that Florida handled it very differently than many other states. As it relates to education, he took on the teachers' unions.

[\(05:49\)](#):

He forced a lot of those schools to be reopened before some of those school districts wanted to come back and threatened to withhold financial state funding and so forth. How much of his persona in Florida that propelled him to a very substantial victory in his own reelection? How much of that has carried over into the presidential race?

Bianca Quilantan [\(06:13\)](#):

I think a good amount. I think that he's planning to pitch the record that he has to general GOP rank and file voters because they really enjoy the fact that he's willing to fight battles with Democrats and civil rights groups. I think that those battles have really propelled him into the spotlight.

[\(06:31\)](#):

I think that personality is continuing to grow or we're able to see more of it on the campaign trail, and we'll probably see it in August, especially if they ask him anything about the fights he's engaged with. I mean, we saw him fight the college board. We saw him fight the teachers' unions, as you said. We've also seen him fight the education department on several things. He's really made a name for himself as a governor who's willing to push back against things he disagrees with.

Jason Altmire [\(06:59\)](#):

At the K-12 level, you talk about the Parents Bill of Rights Act. They talk about the use of teaching on transgender topics related to the famous "Don't Say Gay" law that he passed where you're not allowed to use that term, in some cases. The nonpartisan school races in Florida, he involved himself in a way that political candidates and political leaders have not traditionally involved themselves, to great success. Many of the candidates that he endorsed won.

[\(07:29\)](#):

Regarding race and diversity, of course, the battles over the school books and what's going to be in the history lessons, these are all things that he's been getting national attention on and pushing the envelope perhaps further than anybody else. But you mentioned higher education and some of the things he's done, which has gotten a little bit less play nationally. Can you talk a little bit more about his higher education philosophy?

Bianca Quilantan [\(07:57\)](#):

Honestly, his higher education philosophy is very similar to the one he has towards K-12. It's basically, in his words, battling woke indoctrination. That's anything that has to do with teaching about race or gender in ways that he may not agree with or that he thinks should not be taught in schools. I think a lot of the strategies that he has used at the K-12 level are also really relevant to what he's doing with higher ed. You mentioned those school board races. He backed 30 candidates, I believe, and funneled in \$2 million into those campaigns.

[\(08:35\)](#):

And with that success, he was able to revamp several school districts, those governing boards of the school districts and school boards so they could oust superintendents that may have gone against

DeSantis during the pandemic or have pushback on other policies. He's done the same thing with New College, which I think is the greatest example of where he's really using his bully pulpit to reshape higher education.

[\(09:02\)](#):

He's basically taken this small liberal arts college of I think it had about 700 people when they were talking about revamping it, and he's trying to turn it into a more conservative leaning college, very similar to Hillsdale College in Michigan. He's saying it's because that school was captured by political ideology and selective truths, which is what he has also said about K-12 education.

[\(09:28\)](#):

What he did with that college is very similar to what he did during those elections. He appointed six new trustees and they ousted the president in January. He has taken that strategy of installing key allies in order to push forward his policy agenda, and he's been successful in doing it.

Jason Altmire [\(09:47\)](#):

You've written a lot about the Florida colleges and higher education throughout the state looking at spending on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and the coursework related to those issues. The governor has been very involved in prescribing what that should look like. Is that unusual to compare what's happening in other states? Is Florida doing more of that, or is that just something that's happening across the country?

Bianca Quilantan [\(10:17\)](#):

Florida is doing more of that, but what we can predict from this is that we will expect more of it from other states. Like I said earlier, he created this blueprint for other states to follow in his lead. We've seen several instances where policies or laws that were passed in Florida have been adopted in similar natures or similar language in other states. This DEI push, he may have started the pushback on DEI, but it is trickling to states like Texas and it's trickling to states that are more conservative.

[\(10:51\)](#):

We're very likely to see this maybe take off more in the next state legislative sessions next year. It just takes a while for these things to be adopted. He led it this year. He passed several higher education bills on DEI that prevent hiring, what is it, he called loyalty oaths. They're basically DEI statements intended for hiring purposes. And also just DEI programs, he cut that funding for DEI programs on campus. While we haven't seen them in other states yet, we are likely to see similar pushes next legislative session.

Jason Altmire [\(11:27\)](#):

There's been a little pushback from the left on this, and there have been articles written that have claimed that faculty recruitment has been an issue in Florida. You referenced New college, that they've had an exodus of faculty in response to this. The same has happened in recruitment of top administrators and faculty across the state university system. Is that something that you've seen in your reporting? Is there truth to that?

Bianca Quilantan ([11:54](#)):

I've seen several reports on New College and the hiring. I don't think that the administration really has taken a lot of, I guess, credit for that or they've refuted it or said, "We're finding people. Mind your own business," is the vibe, but I think that they're trying to boost up other things. I think they've had an unprecedented boost in enrollment this year for that small college. But I will say when we talk to DEI groups or those administrators, that they have been worried about their jobs on campus.

([12:29](#)):

You're likely to lose those people that facilitate those conversations on campus. Maybe some professors feel this chilling effect. Maybe, not maybe, probably, very likely that they feel this chilling effect where they can't teach on gender or race in the classroom as they would like to, and so maybe they're pursuing other jobs. It's a very possible reality, but I have not personally confirmed that report.

Jason Altmire ([12:51](#)):

There are several issues both on the regulatory and legislative front federally that we care about, Career Education Colleges and Universities and our members, but I don't find that those are the issues that really drive political campaigns. I mean, we fight those battles every day, but I don't hear them talked about quite often on the campaign trail.

([13:15](#)):

I find it interesting that Governor DeSantis has chosen this as one of his key issues, higher education, although the issues are a little bit different. How much do you think the presidential campaign generally as it starts to evolve and play out here will focus on or be determined by higher education?

Bianca Quilantan ([13:36](#)):

That one's a little bit tougher, because yes, he's pushing back on DEI in his state and all these other potential candidates are also pushing back on these things. However, they picked the wonkiest things to get into. I don't know that they will garner much dinner table conversation, so I don't know how much focus they'll add. But the weirdest one that I thought, well, I thought was weird was that he mentioned college accreditation.

([14:05](#)):

I don't know that families sit around the table and talk about their college accreditors, I think we'll see that have a lot of play. We'll see a lot of this woke ideology stuff at play, especially during the debate later this month. But whether they're policies of substance that can actually be acted on, I'm not sure.

Jason Altmire ([14:27](#)):

When Congress is talking about higher education, they're often talking about Title IV programs and accessibility and accountability. And with so much happening in the fall related to the budget and the potential for a government shutdown and all the rest, how much attention do you think these issues will get politically versus the people who live and breathe by those issues and depend on those programs? It doesn't seem like those are the things that people are talking about in Washington right now.

Bianca Quilantan ([15:04](#)):

Well, I will say they tried to last week with the hearing on accountability and the cost of college, but I'm not sure that there was a path forward on legislation or anything like that, especially as we're talking about the budget. With Title IV funding, I think everyone is interested in learning about the value or how do we measure the value of an institution, but I'm not sure that that will influence the way that approach shakes out. It's just the way it is, unfortunately.

Jason Altmire ([15:36](#)):

We've noticed a difference in rhetorically the way these issues are being talked about because we have talked in every forum in every possible way about the need for all schools to be held accountable by the same criteria and same metrics. And because of access to data, you can compare schools right now, any two schools you want based upon their outcomes in a way that you couldn't 10 years ago. It has become impossible to ignore that issue to pretend like you're not able to make those comparisons.

[\(16:10\)](#):

We've noticed a sea change in the way those issues are talked about, where many of the regulatory proposals that are put forward, they may not include accountability being enforced, but at least they include disclosure of outcomes. You're seeing a lot of reports come out from the think tanks in the academic community related to the outcomes at different types of schools. I think that's different than it used to be, because it used to be focused mostly on the for-profit sector.

[\(16:41\)](#):

Do you think when Congress looks at these issues moving forward that they'll take a more holistic approach in holding all schools accountable?

Bianca Quilantan ([16:50](#)):

I think they have been. I think that the student loan conversation really has pushed this forward talking about accountability, especially when students are pulling out all these loans and not ending up at the college degree sometimes. Completion rates are a huge issue. I think that that hearing was a first stab at trying to... From the House Education and Workforce Committee, was the first stab at trying to figure out, can we talk about this holistically rather than targeting certain sectors? There is still that politics where Democrats lean against proprietary colleges.

[\(17:27\)](#):

They have more of a reservation towards them when it comes to outcomes or whether the degree they received from those institutions are worth it. But we did see conversation and dialogue about completion or what is the value of the degree? Were you able to get a job after you received your degree? I do think that it is the start. However, we're pushing into the last year of this Congress. That year is usually mired by politics because they're all running again, so things that we were looking forward to having maybe bipartisan passage on may not come to fruition because of it.

Jason Altmire ([18:11](#)):

I think one of the issues that does have a chance of bipartisan passage is this idea of a short-term Pell Grant to use for career-oriented programs. Where do you think that debate stands now? Our concern obviously is the exclusion of for-profit schools. The student would not be able to choose to attend those schools using that short-term Pell Grant. That's a Senate proposal. The House, there appears to be bipartisan consensus to include for-profit schools. How do you think that's going to play out?

Bianca Quilantan ([18:42](#)):

I think it depends on timing. We've had this conversation for several years about making short-term Pell a reality. It's really going to be about timing. I think if they could get it done in the next six months, it would be more likely to pass it. When we're talking about how this will shake out, I think maybe proprietary colleges aren't the biggest sticking point. I think the sticking point is what data can we collect? We have people like Virginia Fox, who are not really into the College Transparency Act, which is the part that would go along with the jobs bill.

([19:18](#)):

I think we've talked about it like a year ago or so when that was included in the China bills or some other proposals. I think the bigger sticking point might be how can we ensure that these schools or these programs are leading students better off and that we're using the Pell grants for programs that do allow students to achieve degrees. I actually think that the biggest sticking point will be data and what we can collect.

Jason Altmire ([19:45](#)):

Our guest today has been Bianca Quilantan. She is an education writer for Politico, and primarily you would see her in the morning newsletter. Bianca, if somebody wanted to sign up for that newsletter and see your writing, how would they do it?

Bianca Quilantan ([20:03](#)):

Just Google Weekly Education. I'm pretty sure we'll be the first ones to pop up, or follow us on Twitter @morning_edu, or you can follow me on Twitter @BiancaQ-U-I-L-A-N.

Jason Altmire ([20:12](#)):

Bianca Quilantan, thank you for being with us.

Bianca Quilantan ([20:17](#)):

Thanks, Jason.

Jason Altmire ([20:19](#)):

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