

Education Reform

THE ISSUE:

American education is at a crossroads. The federal government's role in education has grown significantly over the past half-century, infringing on our long-held principle of federalism in education. Massive spending increases, and the reams of regulations that accompany them, have not led to better results. Meaningful reforms like school choice, moreover, have been stymied by special interests. To restore a sense of self-government, empower families, and yield educational excellence, it is imperative that educational authority be returned to states and local leaders and parents.

THE FACTS:

- **Increased Federal Control.** The federal government's continued overreach into education has culminated in a push to implement national standards and tests, which threatens the long-established right of parents to direct their children's education and muzzles the states' traditional role in designing school curricula. National standards threaten to standardize mediocrity by undercutting those states that demand more from their students.
- **Increased Spending.** Increased federal control of education has corresponded with increased education spending from Washington. Today, combined federal, state, and local education spending exceeds \$580 billion annually, or about 4.2 percent of GDP. But while inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending has more than doubled since 1970—it now exceeds \$10,000 per student per year—academic achievement has stagnated and graduation rates have remained flat.
- **Teachers Unions Stifle Education Reform.** Many of the problems plaguing American education today can

be attributed directly to the influence of unions and the unions' staunch opposition to meaningful education reform. According to the Federal Election Commission, teachers unions spent more than \$71 million in 2007–2008 on campaigns and candidates, with 95 percent of their contributions going to left-leaning politicians and their causes.

- **Undermining School Choice for Children in Need.**

One casualty of the Obama Administration's education agenda is the successful and highly popular D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP), which provides scholarships of up to \$7,500 for low-income children in the nation's capital. Sadly, the White House wants to phase out this program despite its proven track record of increasing the educational achievement of the students receiving opportunity scholarships.

THE SOLUTIONS:

- **Free States from Federal Red Tape.** States should have the freedom to opt out of federal education programs and should be allowed to consolidate federal funding in order to direct resources to any lawful education purpose under state statute. Policymakers can look to past models, such as the Academic Achievement for All Act (Straight As) and the A-PLUS Act for inspiration. Freeing states from Washington mandates and empowering state leaders to exercise greater control over education funding would foster innovation, efficiency, and excellence.
- **Reject National Standards and Tests.** Congress should reject and dismantle the Obama Administration's effort to establish federal standards and tests. State oversight of standards and tests will make them more transparent and accountable to parents.

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Education

Return authority to the states and empower parents with the opportunity to choose a safe and effective school. This product is part of the Education Initiative, one of 10 transformational initiatives in our Leadership for America campaign.

- Curb Federal Education Spending.** Education spending has no correlation with academic achievement. Yet Congress, at the behest of teachers unions, continues to increase federal spending on education. Instead of increasing funding for public education, federal and state policymakers should embrace reforms that focus resources on the classroom, rather than on the so-called education blob—the tens of thousands of bureaucrats who do not contribute to the quality of classroom teaching.
- Free Students to Attend Safe, Effective Schools.** In order to improve educational outcomes, parents should be empowered to hold schools accountable through school choice. Research demonstrates that students who participate in school choice programs achieve more academically than those who do not. State policymakers should be free to allow parents to convert their share of federal funds in programs such as IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and Title I to school choice initiatives, i.e., allowing funds to follow children to schools, including private schools, that best meet their needs.

