



Policy Points

POSITIONS ON EDUCATION POLICY: Barack Obama and Mitt Romney

The 2012 presidential election is a pivotal event for educators in the United States. President Obama's and Governor Romney's approaches to federal education policy, which has been governed by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) since 2002, are significantly different. This inaugural edition of *Policy Points* provides a review of their positions.

The information about Romney's education plan is from his campaign white paper, *A Chance for Every Child: Mitt Romney's Plan for Restoring the Promise of American Education*, and the Republican Party platform. The information about Obama's education plan is from the Democratic Party platform and his campaign website, because no similar white paper has been produced by the Obama campaign. The Obama campaign highlights education accomplishments during the president's administration and references these changes as evidence of Obama's campaign education positions, citing U.S. Department of Education resources. We have done likewise. As a result, this *Policy Points* is not a direct or exact comparison of each candidate's stance on particular

"Education is the investment our generation makes in the future."¹

—Mitt Romney

"A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world."²

—Barack Obama

education policy issues, but instead provides an overview of each candidate's overall approach to education policy.

Information and quotes have been pulled directly from the source materials without modification, synthesis, or analysis, to avoid even the appearance of support or favoritism for either candidate. As a nonpartisan organization, ASCD does not endorse candidates. This resource is intended to inform our members about the presidential candidates' views on policies affecting students, educators, schools, and communities.

ASCD *Policy Points* is a new ASCD Educator Advocates resource that will spotlight timely education policy issues of importance to all educators. Future editions may illuminate education issues on which you can take action, and will include links to useful resources, infographics, and tips for increasing your influence with policymakers and other education stakeholders. **Sign up at www.educatoradvocates.org to receive the *Capitol Connection* e-newsletter and the most up-to-date information on federal education policy.**

MOVING AMERICA FORWARD

As president, **Barack Obama** implemented significant reforms to promote school improvement. Among these are providing states flexibility from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and offering funding for states that promise significant school improvements. He remains committed to challenging states to “raise their standards so students graduate ready for college or career and can succeed in a dynamic global economy.”³



Per the Obama campaign’s education positions, this information is a summary of the administration’s education initiatives and activities during his first term, and so will be different in tone and content from the summary provided herein of Governor Romney’s education campaign proposals.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

“We want to support breakthrough work that dramatically improves the quality of early learning and development programs serving high-need children.”⁴

States have been invited to apply for Race to the Top (RTT) Early Childhood grants to address early childhood development and education. States receiving grants must: increase the number of disadvantaged children enrolled in early-learning programs; “design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services”⁵; and align assessments with National Research Council recommendations.

K–12 POLICY

“The purpose is not to give states and districts a reprieve from accountability, but rather to unleash energy to improve our schools at the local level.”⁶

Accountability: The Obama administration proposed waivers for states from the adequate yearly progress requirements of NCLB in return for implementing their own systems of differentiated recognition, accountability based on student growth, and school improvement.

Standards: President Obama encouraged states to adopt college- and career-ready standards through both the RTT and NCLB waiver initiatives, generally understood to mean the Common Core State Standards. The Obama administration also maintains a focus on data by requiring states to “use

cutting-edge data systems to track a child’s progress throughout their academic career.”⁷

Teacher and Leader Effectiveness: Additional NCLB relief was proposed by President Obama from the “highly qualified teacher” requirement in current law for states that promise instead to implement teacher and principal evaluation systems that seek to improve student achievement and the quality of instruction. Evaluation of teachers and leaders is to be based in part on student growth. Two of the three RTT initiatives require states to implement “rigorous plans to develop and evaluate teachers and principals”.⁸ The RTT district plan also requires superintendent evaluations.

School Districts: A third RTT competition was offered by the Obama administration to school districts or groups of districts that “demonstrate how they can personalize education for all students in their schools.”⁹ Applicants must address: teacher, principal, and superintendent evaluations; college- and career-ready standards and graduation requirements; robust data systems; and effective school turnaround strategies.

HIGHER EDUCATION

“Higher education can’t be a luxury—it’s an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford.”¹⁰

College Access and Affordability: Under President Obama, funding for Pell grants was doubled through the elimination of private-sector bank participation in the student financial aid market. New repayment options for student loan borrowers were initiated, limiting payments and offering debt forgiveness for public service. The administration also proposes to shift student aid toward colleges that “do their fair share to keep tuition affordable, provide good value, and serve needy students well.”¹¹

WE BELIEVE IN AMERICA

As president, **Mitt Romney** would tie “federal funds directly to dramatic reforms that expand parental choice, invest in innovation, and reward teachers for their results instead of their tenure.”¹² He intends to “equip state leaders to achieve the change that can only come from commitment and action at the local level.”¹³



Prominent features of Romney’s plan are summarized below. This summary is based on the Romney education white paper, *A Chance for Every Child: Mitt Romney’s Plan for Restoring the Promise of American Education*.

K–12 POLICY AND FUNDING

“Ensuring that all children in the United States have access to a K–12 education that equips them to pursue their dreams is both a fundamental American value and essential for lasting economic prosperity.”¹⁴

Choice and Innovation: Governor Romney is a strong proponent of parental choice as a mechanism to hold schools responsible and accountable for student success. His plan would ensure that parents “receive clear information about the performance of their current school and of the alternatives”¹⁵ and allow students to change schools and bring federal funding to the school of their choice, including private or charter schools. He would also eliminate caps on charter and digital schools and permit federal funding to support the expansion of successful charter and digital school models.

Transparency and Accountability: With a goal of empowering parents with information to hold districts and states accountable, Romney proposes “that states create straightforward public report cards that evaluate each school on its contribution to student learning.”¹⁶ Parents would use this information to evaluate schools and inform their decision on where to enroll their children.

Teacher Effectiveness: Romney proposes to consolidate all existing federal teacher quality programs and instead “offer states flexible block grants if they adopt policies to advance and reward teacher quality, such as eliminating or reforming teacher tenure and establishing evaluation systems that focus on effectiveness in advancing student achievement.”¹⁷ The Romney plan also calls for the elimination of the NCLB’s “highly qualified teacher” requirement.

HIGHER EDUCATION

“More than ever before, fiscal responsibility and resourcefulness are required to refocus investments and deliver results.”¹⁸

Access and Affordability: The Romney education plan seeks to simplify the federal financial aid process by consolidating existing programs and giving “students and families with financial need the appropriate information about completion and persistence, loan repayment rates, future earnings, and other indicators.”¹⁹

Private Sector Participation: With a view toward reversing the Obama administration’s elimination of private bank participation in the student loan market, the Republican plan will embrace “private sector participation in providing information, financing, and the education itself.”²⁰

Innovation and Competition: The Romney plan would encourage new forms of instructional delivery (such as online learning) and eliminate federal regulations that require institutions of higher education to justify their participation in federal student aid programs.

RESEARCH

“The long-term federal investment in basic research within institutions of higher learning has been a crucial engine for innovation in our economy”²¹

Federal investments in basic research within institutions of higher learning will continue to be a priority in a Romney administration, particularly in the physical, biological, and social sciences.



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ENDNOTES

¹2012 Republican Party Platform. Retrieved from http://www.gop.com/2012-republican-platform_home

²White House Website. White House Education Policy Webpage. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education>

³2012 Democratic Party Platform. Retrieved from <http://assets.dstatic.org/dnc-platform/2012-National-Platform.pdf>

⁴U.S. Department of Education. (2011, July 11). Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Program. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning/elc-draft-summary>

⁵U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.) Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Program Description. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>

⁶White House Press Release (2011, September 23). Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/obama-administration-sets-high-bar-flexibility-no-child-left-behind-orde>

⁷White House Press Release (2011, September 23). Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/obama-administration-sets-high-bar-flexibility-no-child-left-behind-orde>

⁸Lee, Jesse. (2010, January 19). Speeding Up the Race to the Top [blog post]. Retrieved from The White House Blog at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/01/19/speeding-race-top>

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¹¹U.S. Department of Education. Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/27/fact-sheet-president-obama-s-blueprint-keeping-college-affordable-and-wi>

¹²⁻²¹ *A Chance for Every Child: Mitt Romney's Plan for Restoring the Promise of American Education* [white paper]. (May 23, 2012). Retrieved from <http://www.mittromney.com/sites/default/files/shared/120523-Education%20White%20Paper%20FINAL%20for%20PDF.pdf>