



HERE'S A SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATES IN YOUR COMMUNITY...
PLEASE SEE THE QUESTIONS INSIDE.

Dear (Candidate):

As a concerned and active part of our community, our organization is vitally interested in the state of our schools and the education of our children. As a leader in our community, you play a critical role in the direction our schools will take over the next few years.

Recent concerns about low student achievement and deteriorating schools at the local, state and national levels have strengthened the cry for re-evaluation and reform. We would like to know your positions on various education issues that have been, or likely will soon be, at the focal point of discussions on improving our schools.

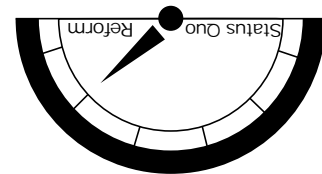
We respectfully request that you complete the enclosed questionnaire on issues of interest to the parents, educators and concerned citizens of our community. Your responses will be widely distributed to our members, as part of our educational effort. A stamped reply envelope has been enclosed for your convenience.

Thank you for your time and interest in our schools and in the education of our children.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Organization



ENCLOSED
IS YOUR
CANDIDATE
EDUCATION
METER

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CANDIDATE EDUCATION METER:

MEASURING THE REFORM DEPTHS OF THOSE RUNNING FOR OFFICE.

Dear Friend,

The Center for Education Reform is pleased to provide you with some tools to help you assess the positions and potential effectiveness of your local candidates — for state legislature, local school board, Congress or other elected office influencing education reform.

To assist your efforts to bring about reform, we provide this survey to help you evaluate the candidates and officials crafting education policy.

There are several ways you can approach candidates, and use this survey to maximize your effort.

First, take a one-on-one approach. Try to interview the candidate on his or her positions. You represent a growing community force — don't hesitate to request a meeting (but remember, this is an opportunity to learn the candidate's views, not sell your own).

If an interview is not possible, send the questionnaire with a cover letter requesting that they fill it out to inform the community of their positions (a sample letter follows). Personalize it to fit your candidate and your

community. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope, making it as easy as possible for them to respond.

You may use the questionnaire directly, or revise it to suit the needs of your state and community. Or you may use it to create the basis for an interview, or to suggest questions appropriate for a public forum, debate, candidate appearance or radio call-in show.

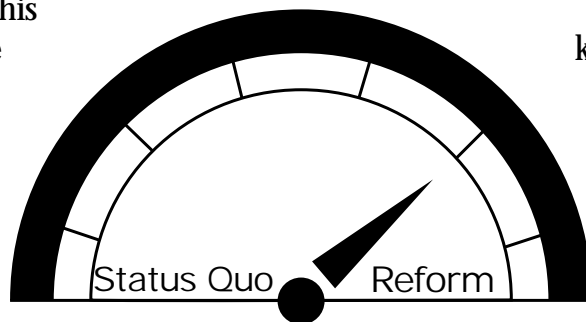
Finally, let your group know the results — including the names of any candidates who may have refused to answer. Send the results to the press, either through a press release, letter to the editor or a call to the local education reporter.

And please send us the results. We'll compare answers to common questions with those from around the country and report to you on the progress of grassroots education reform.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Allen
President



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QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:
MEASURING COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION REFORM

- 1 In Florida, children attending public schools that get failing marks from the state for two consecutive years are allowed to leave and their state education dollars follow them to their school of choice (including private schools). The mere threat of losing students has driven improvements in the public schools.

Would you endorse programs like this to assist children to leave failing schools for better schools — and take their funding with them?
- 2 In many states, parents, teachers and private groups can start “charter” schools, which are independent public schools, free from most rules, open to all interested students, and obligated to produce academic results set forth in performance contracts. There are currently more than 2,000 of these schools. Will you work to expand this number?
- 3 The 38 charter laws in existence today differ greatly. Those states with the most charters allow many different groups to operate charter schools and several different public bodies to sponsor them. Would you support laws allowing universities, cities or state boards of education to approve charters in their communities? Or do you believe that only local school boards should have this authority?
- 4 Opponents of charter schools push for caps on how many charter schools there can be and seek to impose rules on them (such as teacher certification and how many children may attend) that make them more like conventional public schools. Would you oppose such restrictions?
- 5 In New Jersey, since 1986, the teaching profession has been open to people who are qualified in a subject, even if they did not attend a college of education and do not possess traditional teaching credentials. This is called alternative certification. Are you a supporter of opening public school classrooms to well-educated people from other careers and giving them a fast-track route to becoming qualified teachers without a lengthy detour through a college of education?
- 6 At its July 2001 convention, the National Education Association voted to oppose all forms of merit pay, including programs that pay outstanding teachers higher salaries than ordinary (or mediocre) teachers. What do you think of allowing public schools to create performance-based pay systems where teachers are held accountable for how their pupils perform and rewarded when they perform well?
- 7 If you have problems with the concept described in number 6, consider more limited programs such as those in Denver and Cincinnati, which offer bonuses to teachers based on the performance of their whole school. Would you favor this?



- 8 In Houston, then-superintendent Rod Paige (now U.S. Secretary of Education) agreed to tie his own pay to the academic performance of children in the public schools. He catalyzed changes in the Houston school system that led to dramatically stronger achievement among minorities. Should all superintendents and other education leaders be held responsible for the performance of their schools and rewarded commensurately?
- 9 In Milwaukee, up to 15,000 low-income children may choose to attend any public, private or parochial school at government expense (Milwaukee also has charter schools). Since the choice program began in 1991, the Milwaukee school board has enacted dramatic changes and created its own alternative schools. How do you feel about bringing competitive pressure to bear on school systems?
- 10 Some cities and states, such as Dallas and Maryland, have asked private companies like the Edison Project to assume responsibility for running troubled public schools. Do you believe that jurisdictions should be permitted to enter into management contracts of this kind?
- 11 In Florida, the legislature recently attempted to abolish teacher tenure but the teacher unions opposed this proposal. Do you believe that permanent tenure (and similar arrangements carrying other labels) is a necessary protection for teachers or a shield for incompetence that states should do away with?
- 12 Rigorous academic standards are now in place in about a dozen states. These states are also testing students in all schools and will hold those schools, and their students, accountable for their performance. In your view, should states measure student performance against explicit academic benchmarks and then provide rewards and consequences for students and schools according to whether they've produced the desired results?
- 13 As governments at all levels distribute money for public education, some proposals would tie a school's funding directly to the number of children that it serves. This means that in states or localities allowing choice (including public school choice), the child that transfers to a different school essentially takes his funding with him. Do you agree that money should follow children to the school they actually attend?
- 14 Federal education programs have proliferated despite the fact that few of them accomplish their stated goals. Do you believe that the national government should continue devising new programs that seek to solve every perceived educational problem in this country, or do you believe that most such matters are the province of states and communities (and parents) and that Washington's role should be reduced, simplified and made to pass a test of effectiveness?