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EDUCATION REFORM 2004: A VOTER'S GUIDE

A definitive look at how the candidates really stand on education issues

November 2004

You've watched the news. You've sat through three presidential debates. You've been bombarded with lawn signs and bumper stickers and balloons. "And I approved this message" seems to end every commercial on T.V.

As you prepare to enter the polls in the coming days, it is vital that you stop, take a minute away from the noise of the election season, and carefully consider the candidates running for office in your state. The reality is, these candidates will have a significant impact on your children's education – the tests they take, the kinds of books they read, and what teachers will guide them. And the quality of education your community provides will have a lasting impact on all of our lives for generations to come.

CER has been working for months to provide you with the information you need to cast the best votes for your children, your schools, and your communities. This summer, we distributed our annual Candidate Survey to every candidate for governor, state education chief, and United States Senator. We dived deep into the issues, scoured local newspapers across the country, and put every candidate to the test. The end result is the 2004 Voter's Guide – a comprehensive look at every key race in the country and your guide to where the candidates really stand on key education issues.

Remember, it is extremely important that people who want to see improvements made to the education system support candidates who share their views and vision. So read carefully. Ask the tough questions. Do your research. And most importantly, get out there on Election Day and cast your vote.

** Note: Incumbents appear first in each state listing. Candidates for open seats are alphabetical.*



CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT



George W. Bush R
John Kerry D

As the presidential candidates duke it out over the airwaves and in their remaining home town visits, the issue of education is less visible than others, but no less a major point in this race.

The biggest impact a president can make on education is with federal spending, which can be manipulated to support any number of goals. For President Bush, that primary goal is in building a system of federal support that is tied not just to need, but to results. Having led the bi-partisan passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which requires that schools demonstrate "adequate yearly progress," Bush presided over the single biggest increase in federal education spending (\$2.9 billion).

That funding is not enough for John Kerry. Committed to the goals of NCLB that he voted for in 2001, Kerry argues that NCLB is under funded, which wins him the endorsement of both major teachers' unions. Senator Kerry wants also to provide new funds to boost NCLB, teacher training and early childhood programs.

When it comes to teachers, the candidates are also in conflict. In a second term, President Bush would spend \$269 million to provide professional development for high school math teachers. Kerry has pledged to provide teachers with better pay for better results and support for teachers in high need areas. With teacher salaries set outside the Capital, it is unclear how the Senator will fulfill his pledge, which also includes new national standards for teacher certification tests.

In a second term, President Bush would expand funding for an early reading initiative and advanced placement for low-income students, and strengthen vocational education. Senator Kerry proposes a national education trust fund, a wide-ranging after school program, and tax credits of up to \$4,000 to help students pay for college.

Both Bush and Kerry like charter schools and a president can use his bully pulpit -- and some carrots -- to influence states on this issue. Kerry voted for Bush-backed federal grants for charters. Bush and his Administration have also visited the schools. In 1998, Kerry called on unions to rethink tenure and uniform pay scales, and said charter schools could indeed play a large role in improving public education. But his union support causes some Democratic reformers to worry that Kerry's support may be tepid. The choice of Education Secretary is key to how far a president is willing to advocate reform.

The final issue that divides the candidates does so clearly. There is no gray in Kerry's opposition to school choice for low-income children. Senator Kerry opposes to scholarships or vouchers of any sort. President Bush signed into law the nation's first federally funded school choice program in the District of Columbia. Kerry was not present during the vote on that, but voted against a similar amendment in September 1997. He supports choice among public schools.

CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNOR

Education begins and ends in states – and international affairs don't dominate gubernatorial races. So we begin with the state races that are most likely to decide the fate of education in your state in the next four years. Pay close attention not just to what the candidates say, but what they really mean. Governors need the most scrutiny when it comes down to the happy talk of education.

DELAWARE

Ruth Ann Minner D
Bill Lee R

Democratic incumbent Ruth Ann Minner signed legislation this year that authorized the development of a charter school study committee, a popular move by chief executives to clothe their discomfort with an issue and create some question in the public's mind. Anything that needs study can't be good for kids, now can it? Minner puts protecting teachers at the top of her priority list – and education reformers fear that her goals to “refine” school choice and charter school policy mean dramatic rollbacks in the state.

Republican nominee, retired judge Bill Lee, asserts his support for charters and school choice in his formal campaign platform, but CER has not seen tangible plans to advance real reforms in the state. The local teachers' union has not yet weighed in on this race. Perhaps it's such a done deal they don't have to.

INDIANA

Joe Kernan D
Mitch Daniels R

The union jumped in fully to support Acting Governor Joe Kernan, who assumed the office after the death of Governor Frank O'Bannon. Kernan limits his proposed education reforms to the creation of an “early learning trust” to help pre-K kids, as if that were the answer to fixing ailing K-12 schools. Republican challenger Mitch Daniels, director of the Office of Management and Budget under President George W. Bush, has proposed a number of bold reforms for the state, including strong support for charter schools, revisions to the accountability test, and a simplified school funding formula. Indiana's dueling candidates for governor share a belief that the position of state superintendent of public instruction should move from an elected to an appointed position, giving the governor authority over education more directly (a move practiced in most other states).

MISSOURI

Matt Blunt R
Claire McCaskill D

Teachers are key in the gubernatorial race in Missouri. McCaskill, currently serving as Missouri's state auditor, has captured the Missouri-NEA endorsement and promises to send an annual survey to teachers' homes, because (we assume) that would show she was listening. Right in line with her union supporters, McCaskill recently released a report criticizing the state of charter schools in the Show Me State, despite evidence of success to the contrary. Republican Matt Blunt, the incumbent secretary of state, takes a dramatically different stance on teachers. He proposes to help teachers by rewarding them with additional pay for accomplishments and establishing mentoring programs, as well as expanding the hiring pool with alternative certification processes. Both candidates are firm in their opposition to school choice, even as a trial program.

MONTANA

Bob Brown R
Brian Schweitzer D

Both of Montana's gubernatorial candidates fall short of proposing bold education reforms for Montana's schools. Democratic candidate Schweitzer, a rancher by trade, lost his bid for U.S. Senate in 2000. Today, he has the support of the MEA-MFT in his run for the Governor's office. Expanding vocational and community college opportunities are at the top of his short list of education priorities – a list that does not include charter schools (he is an avid opponent). Republican nominee Brown currently serves as secretary of state and boasts a long resume of past public roles, having served in the Montana legislature and state board of education. Brown isn't very reformist, either. His main issues are support for repaying school loans for the state's teachers and increased education funding across the board.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Craig Benson R
John Lynch D

Governor Craig Benson has a nationally recognized track record as an education reformer. He is solid in his support of expanding charter schools and initiating school choice programs in New Hampshire. He supports real world learning programs, and would secure additional private contributions to equip students with computers and expand after school programs. Most recently, he has proposed to create a state kindergarten program using vouchers to offer families options rather than creating a statewide mandated system that offers no choice.

With such proposals, it comes as no surprise that the state's union is firmly in his opponent's camp. Democratic challenger John Lynch enjoys the endorsement of the state teachers' union and frequently joins them in criticizing the current governor's reforms, particularly the kindergarten voucher program. Lynch believes more money is the key to improving New Hampshire schools.

NORTH CAROLINA

Mike Easley D
Patrick Ballantine R

The state's NEA affiliate has endorsed Democratic candidate Mike Easley for governor. Easley wants increased funding for North Carolina schools, better pay for teachers, and a focus on more teacher certification. As for the state's charter schools, Easley supports maintaining a strict cap on the number of schools allowed, which is currently maxed out at 100. His opponent, current Wilmington state senator Patrick Ballantine, proposes bolder reforms, such as a repeal of the cap on the state's charter schools and the teacher friendly notion of shifting education funds away from bureaucracies and into the classroom.



NORTH DAKOTA

John Hoeven R
Joe Satrom D

Challenger Democrat Satrom seeks to use the bully pulpit of the Governor's office to "build a wide constituency of support for meeting our state's goals [in education]," but he has done little to define what those goals will be. His opponent, incumbent Republican Hoeven, has a much more specific plan in place for education, including provisions to improve equity in school funding, expand technical assistance to school districts, and improve vocational and technical education. Republican Heoven's proposals have secured him an endorsement from the state's teachers' union. There is no discussion of education reform in this race. Pity.

UTAH

Scott Matheson D
Jon Huntsman R

Education reformers rallied against sitting Utah Governor Olene Walker when she vetoed a bill that would have given parents of students with disabilities the choice to send their children to private schools. This set the stage for Jon Huntsman to come in and grab the Republican nomination right out from under her. Huntsman, a businessman and official early in the Bush administration, aggressively supports school choice and has made it a centerpiece of his campaign. Competition, he says, is healthy for the whole educational system. His opponent, law school dean Scott Matheson, claims to support choice in the form of charter schools, but proposes reforms that would not result in a strong charter environment.

VERMONT

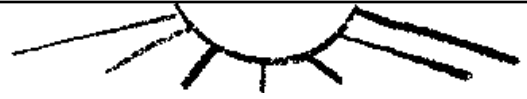
Jim Douglas R
Peter Clavelle D

As Governor, Jim Douglas has appointed school choice-friendly members to the Vermont Board of Education and promises to continue the modest reform momentum building in the Green Mountain State. His track record has earned him the support of the state's education reform community. The Vermont-NEA is fighting that momentum by endorsing Douglas' democratic challenger and Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle. Clavelle wants to close the education gap between the haves and the have-nots in the state, but dismisses school choice as a tool to meet that goal.

WASHINGTON

Christine Gregoire D

Dino Rossi R



A hotly debated state referendum on charter schools has put the issue front-and-center in the state's gubernatorial race. As a state legislator, Republican Dino Rossi repeatedly voted for charter schools and continues to pledge his support for the model. He also supports a number of other substantive reforms, such as pay for performance for teachers and flexibility in funding. It's no surprise then that the WEA – at the helm of the fight over charter schools – has endorsed Rossi's Democratic opponent, Attorney General Christine Gregoire. Gregoire has plans to beef up the state's bureaucracy with an education cabinet. She wants to tackle the state's dropout rate (with no clear plan) and increase teachers' salaries. And Gregoire makes it clear that charter schools will not be a part of her plan – she has been a leader in the fight to repeal the law passed by the Democratic-controlled legislature earlier this year.

WEST VIRGINIA

Joe Manchin D

Monty Warner R

School enrollment is dropping throughout the Mountain State as more and more West Virginians leave their communities to find jobs. Both gubernatorial candidates say strengthening K-12 education is the key to a stronger work force and attracting businesses to the state. But neither candidate has proposed bold, substantive reforms. With the support of the West Virginia version of the NEA, Manchin is calling for a focus on early childhood development and slowing consolidation of the state's schools. Warner falls short of outlining specific education initiatives, focusing most of his energy on creating jobs in the state, although his party's platform supports charter schools.



CANDIDATES FOR UNITED STATES SENATE

The leading issues in the presidential election are echoed here. Fighting terrorism, economic development, jobs and health care trump education this time. CER was able to squeeze out the education reform prowess of most of the candidates for U.S. Senate. One notable debating point has been, not surprisingly, NCLB. The candidates in favor of NCLB tend to support its accountability and tough-love provisions; those opposed couch their support in more funding, suggesting NCLB would be more palatable with more federal money attached. No surprise then that the unions back candidates who pledge to fight for funding.

ALABAMA

Richard Shelby	R
Wayne Sowell	D

Relative unknown Wayne Sowell is staging a “David and Goliath” fight against long-term Alabama Senator Richard Shelby. Education is not a key issue here. A look at the record, however, shows that Shelby has voted in favor of a handful of reform-friendly pieces of legislation, including scholarship opportunities for Washington, D.C.’s poorest students and NCLB. These pro-reform votes have not earned him points with the NEA – which gives him a 27 percent approval rating.

Sowell says he supports charter schools, but by asserting that his top education priority is “saving public education,” (as if charters are not public) he suggests otherwise.

ALASKA

Lisa Murkowski	R
Tony Knowles	D

Only weeks before Election Day, former Governor Tony Knowles launched a television advertising campaign attacking his challenger, Senator Lisa Murkowski, on her education track record. The spots feature real-life, local teachers and promises to make education a key point in a heated race for U.S. Senate.

Murkowski, the state’s junior U.S. Senator, tells Alaskans that more money must be put into their ailing schools. But the rookie senator knows that money isn’t the only answer. She supports new teacher recruitment and retention programs, pay-for-performance incentives, and high school exit exams. She thinks the charter school model works for some kids, but the most important solution of all, she says, lies in the hands of parents. This mother of two sons believes all parents should “retain and be encouraged to have an active role in schools.” Her Democratic opponent, former Governor Tony Knowles, puts more weight on the importance of increased school funding. In fact, his high-profile advertising campaign focuses solely on putting more money into the state’s schools. He is aggressive in his opposition to NCLB – arguing that the Act actually “hurts Alaska’s children.” And school choice is also at the top of his bad list – a position, certainly, that helped him secure his endorsement from the NEA.

ARIZONA

John McCain	R
Stuart Starky	D

Popular incumbent Senator John McCain and his Democratic challenger Stuart Starky may agree on a handful of issues – but it is clear that education is not one of them.

McCain is an education reformer – consistent and bold in his support for charter schools, efficient government spending, and a limited bureaucracy. He wants the federal government out of the classroom (and yes, that includes NCLB). He believes teachers should be tested and rewarded financially for performance. And he promotes tax credits for businesses that provide scholarship money for kids to attend private schools. McCain says that his state has “broken through the power of the teachers’ union” to create charter schools and adds that “the best schools in my state happen to be charter schools.” No surprise then that the NEA leans heavily on the side of his Democratic challenger, Stuart Starky. The former 8th grade teacher accuses the charter school movement of “destroying the public school foundation” of the Grand Canyon State. He is firmly committed to fighting for more money for Arizona schools – a passion matched only by his stark opposition to President Bush and U.S. Secretary Rod Paige.

ARKANSAS

Blanche Lincoln	D
Jim Holt	R

The difference between sitting Senator Blanche Lincoln and her Republican challenger, Jim Holt, is clear: Lincoln wants to make changes within Arkansas’ education system, while Holt, a libertarian, would prefer to eliminate the system all together.

Holt returns to a worn out issue when he says he would strive to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education (which would include NCLB). He supports school choice and charters, but only if there is absolutely no government involvement. Since both are tools to administer public schooling, charters and choice would likely fall off his “A” list, if current programs serve as any indication. Lincoln, on the other hand, supports increased funding for the system, especially NCLB. Arkansas insiders say she’s warming to charter schools – participating front-and-center in a recent school opening and lending a hand to secure federal funding to boost the school’s staff. But Lincoln remains steadfast in her opposition to other forms of school choice, ensuring that she can continue to boast an endorsement from the NEA. This is a mixed bag for reformers, but thankfully, it’s the state offices that really count on education.

CALIFORNIA

Barbara Boxer	D
Bill Jones	R

The NEA has consistently awarded U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer top ratings. The union accolades are certainly a product of her consistent opposition to union-dreaded school choice initiatives. Boxer has voted against the D.C. scholarship program twice during her tenure in the U.S. Senate (despite sister-Senator Dianne Feinstein’s support of the program). This year, the long-time senator puts increased funding for NCLB at the top of her education priority list.



Former California Secretary of State and Republican challenger Bill Jones earns his accolades from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, as well as many of the state's chambers of commerce (which have officially endorsed his candidacy). Jones is a strong proponent of reinvigorating the state's vocational education programs. As far as charters and choice go, he has provided little information on specific plans. But California insiders say his track record as secretary of state bodes well for the reform community.

COLORADO

Pete Coors	R
Ken Salazar	D

Democrat Ken Salazar accused his GOP opponent, Pete Coors, of “flip-flopping” on one of the state's top education issues – NCLB. The accusation started what would become one of the senatorial candidates' most public and heated debates. And it might well be the term reformers would use to describe Salazar himself. The controversy arose because Coors professes to support the accountability provisions of NCLB, but is sympathetic to local school concerns surrounding the another level of bureaucracy. He supports “providing more parents with choices,” which most insiders acknowledge includes the state's robust charter program and any effort to make bold advances of school choice.

Colorado reformers will remember that Attorney General Salazar once supported the same bill as Republican Governor Owens to create a school choice program. But apparently since then, Salazar has come out against school choice programs. Instead (probably to attract the status quo's support), his priorities now include “funding and fixing” NCLB and education spending increases across the board. Salazar takes the tepid approach on testing, too, and argues that tests should be used to “diagnose” problems, but that they should not “punish” schools that fail. That's “A”-okay for the NEA – which supports this candidate 100 percent.

CONNECTICUT

Chris Dodd	D
Jack Orchulli	R

Democratic incumbent Chris Dodd is seeking his fifth term representing the Constitution State in the U.S. Senate. He believes Connecticut kids need a solid start to succeed – supporting his belief by serving as chairman of a Democratic task force on early child development and becoming a leading advocate for Head Start. In addition, Dodd promotes a heavy emphasis on foreign exchange programs and starting foreign language studies at an early age. Dodd opposed the creation of the D.C. scholarship program – a position that helped earn him the endorsement of the NEA.

The NEA can't be pleased with the education reforms Republican Jack Orchulli has proposed, such as teacher pay-for-performance, business partnerships, and expanding school choice. Orchulli also consistently backs the value of test scores – holding tests up as an important tool that must be used to hold schools accountable.

FLORIDA

Betty Castor D

Mel Martinez R

As in many states, accountability is central to the education debate in the Sunshine State. Former Bush administration official Mel Martinez and his Democrat opponent, former Commissioner of Education Betty Castor, hold dramatically different views on how Florida's schools should be held accountable.

The state teachers' union sides with Castor, who opposes NCLB and wants to trade in what she believes is a heavy focus on standardized testing for a "more sensible approach to accountability". State test scores should not be connected to financial consequences for failing schools, she says, despite widespread evidence that the state's landmark accountability program has increased achievement across the state. The state's teachers remember Castor as a strong advocate for increased teachers salaries in her role as state education chief, and Castor promises them that she will continue that focus if elected to the U.S. Senate. Despite her close ties to the teachers' union, Castor did support the development of charter schools in her former role as president of the University of South Florida. But that was then.

Martinez has taken a strong stance against the unions' efforts to protect poorly performing teachers from being removed from the classroom. He believes teachers and schools should, indeed, be held accountable for student results. He supports NCLB and advocates for "giving parents choices when schools fail their children" – the principal behind the state's system. Martinez believes there is value in competition.

GEORGIA

Denise Majette D

Johnny Isakson R

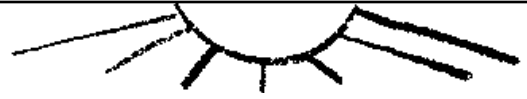
Neither Denise Majette nor her Republican opponent Johnny Isakson is satisfied with maintaining the education status quo. They both currently serve on the House Education and Workforce Committee in Congress and have made education a signature issue. But the two propose very different plans on how best to bring positive change to education in the Peach State.

Choice and accountability serve as the foundation of Isakson's plan. He is a proud sponsor of NCLB and the D.C. choice legislation. He believes that the job of lawmakers is to "make public education a good choice rather than the only choice." He is an avid supporter of charter schools – serving as the co-chair of this year's National Charter School Week. And Isakson seeks to enhance flexibility, preparedness, and accountability across all schools, having supported "Ed-Flex" legislation in Congress, alternative routes for certification, and the Ready to Teach Act.

While her opponent sponsored NCLB, Majette is a patron of new legislation that would "fully fund" the initiative. She, too, believes in choices for parents – but she is firm in her belief that those choices must remain inside the conventional public school system. She is a charter school supporter, but is persistent in her opposition to bolder school choice programs. Those convictions have no doubt played an important role in winning the Congresswoman an endorsement from the NEA.

HAWAII

Daniel Inouye D
Cam Cavasso R



Hawaii's senior Senator has demonstrated that he believes money is the answer to the challenges facing Hawaii's schools. He demands more resources across the board, "full-funding" of NCLB, and reduced class sizes. He made his stance clear on school choice when he voted "no" on the D.C. scholarship program. And the NEA backs him 100 percent.

Republican nominee Cam Cavasso is a three-term state representative and businessman. As a candidate for lieutenant governor in 2002, Cavasso advocated the creation of smaller school districts and the decentralization of the Hawaii Department of Education, which currently is the state's only school district.

IDAHO

Michael Crapo R
Scott McClure I (write-in candidate)

Long-time Idaho Senator Michael Crapo was headed into the election season uncontested until engineer Scott McClure waged a write-in campaign. McClure believes that money is not the "be all and end all" of education progress and counsels Idahoans that "we must look at how we are allocating our resources to accomplish educating all children to the peak of their capability regardless of social or economic barriers." He worries that NCLB will stifle schools and prefers control be left to the states.

While Crapo's efforts inside the Beltway have focused largely on an amendment for school prayer, he has demonstrated support for school choice with a "yes" vote for the D.C. scholarship program. Idaho insiders say Crapo is warming to charter schools, but the Senator has yet to publicly voice his support or take action to support charters. The NEA has not weighed in on this contest, but has shown little support for Crapo and his positions in the past, though his wife is a public school teacher.

IOWA

Chuck Grassley R
Art Small D

Incumbent Republican Senator Grassley is enjoying wide support in his bid for reelection. His powerful role as Chairman of the Senate's finance committee keeps his plate full, but Grassley has made time to cast a few key education votes. He voted "yes" on NCLB and continues to advocate for the transparency that the Act brings to the system. He fought for school choice in the District of Columbia, attempted to arm school districts against frivolous lawsuits, and sought to grant teachers tax credits for professional development work.

Democratic rival and former legislator Art Small does not share his opponent's support for NCLB. He is avid in his opposition to what he calls a focus on uniformity, not quality. Small claims to support public school choice, but proposes damaging restrictions on charters. He also claims to support some form of pay-for-performance, but has failed to back up that claim with any legislative action.

ILLINOIS

Barack Obama D
Alan Keyes R

After a highly publicized political scandal and an exhaustive search, Republicans finally found a candidate to run against popular Democrat Barack Obama. Alan Keyes, a former candidate for one of Maryland's seats in the U.S. Senate, will face off against Obama this fall.

Obama combines both conventional and reform-friendly proposals in his platform for education. He calls for increased funding for Illinois schools and NCLB, but also supports bold reforms such as pay-for-performance for teachers and strong private investment in public education. Obama is committed to taking care of Illinois' charter schools – proposing increases in state funds for school construction and facilities maintenance. While Obama stops short of supporting school choice programs beyond charters, his opponent Keyes does not. Keyes wants to “break up the government monopoly in education” and put ultimate control in the hands of parents. Illinois' teachers' unions have tipped their hat to Obama on this one.

INDIANA

Evan Bayh D
Marvin Scott R

Democratic incumbent Senator Evan Bayh has the full support of the NEA in his bid for reelection and his call for more funding for Indiana schools. Funding, in fact, is central in his plan to improve his state's schools. Unfortunately, more choices for parents have failed to make their way into the Senator's plan. He is a fierce opponent of school choice and voted against D.C. Opportunity Scholarships. However, the Senator and former Governor has shown moderate support for the state's charter schools.

In contrast, GOP contender Marvin Scott, a professor at Butler University, gives charters and choice top billing in his list of education priorities. He promises to “push strongly” for school choice programs to help struggling kids attend private schools, as well as to promote federal funding for after-school tutoring. He proposes to increase local control in public education and empower schools to make their own funding decisions.

KANSAS

Sam Brownback R
Lee Jones D

One education issue has risen above the rest in the battle for Kansas' Senate seat: NCLB. Sitting Republican Senator Sam Brownback voted for the bill and consistently defends it – guarding his constituents against making premature judgments before the legislation has had time to be fully implemented. His Democratic opponent Lee Jones has made criticism of NCLB central in his campaign – accusing the Act of “replacing learning with testing.”

Jones is less clear on his stance on choice and charter schools, having remained nearly silent on major reform issues. In contrast, Brownback has been a long-time and vocal advocate for parental choice. He helped create D.C.'s school choice program and says school choice has “a drastic and positive impact on students, especially minority students.”

KENTUCKY

Jim Bunning R
Daniel Mongiardo D



School prayer is the centerpiece of Republican incumbent Jim Bunning’s education agenda. He proposes providing federal aid only to those schools that allow voluntary school prayer. But Bunning set aside his longtime core issue long enough to go head-to-head with his Democratic opponent Daniel Mongiardo on NCLB. Bunning supports the law and believes that it provides adequate local control, while Mongiardo is aggressively opposed to it. Mongiardo has focused on improving teacher quality and directing more money to school infrastructure.

Neither candidate has articulated positions on school choice or charters, which is not surprising given that the Bluegrass State is just about the only state where neither issue has gained traction.

LOUISIANA

Chris John D or
John Kennedy D
David Vitter R

The peculiar electoral system in the Bayou State can yield unpredictable results. All candidates are on the ballot in the November election. If no candidate receives a majority, the top two vote-getters, regardless of party, advance to a December runoff.

Louisiana Republicans have coalesced around the candidacy of Congressman David Vitter to fill the open seat left by the retiring John Breaux, which all but assures him of a spot in the runoff. Democrats hope to place a candidate in the runoff as well – Congressman Chris John and State Treasurer John Kennedy are the leading contenders. Vitter is specific in his call for substantive reforms to Louisiana schools. He supports a pilot school choice program – which is consistent with a state push last year – and serious efforts to eliminate the educational bureaucracy’s “red tape.” Streamlining the system, he says, will bring more money to the classroom. But he tempers that solution – emphasizing that money is not the only answer. He says more significant are “the right policies that involve parents, evaluate schools, and create choices.”

John’s and Kennedy’s views on education are similar, while in stark contrast to their front-running opponent Vitter’s positions. Both Democratic candidates argue that more funding is the way to go with NCLB. They also support early child development programs and more money for teachers. They are both in favor of expanding charter schools, but are opposed to school choice, even as a pilot program. John voted “no” on the D.C. school choice program.

MARYLAND

Barbara Mikulski D
Edward J. (EJ) Pipkin R

Democratic incumbent Mikulski has made it clear what her solution is for ailing schools – money. She boasts that she has secured hundreds of million of dollars for Maryland schools and that more funding for NCLB is next on her to-do list. She vigorously opposes school choice and has voted against the creation of a D.C. scholarship program on several occasions. During all the debate in the Mason-Dixon state on charters, Mikulski is not known to have ever spoken a word in support of bringing this reform home. The NEA backs her and her positions 100 percent.

MARYLAND (CONTINUED)

Her Republican challenger, State Senator E. J. Pipkin believes it is more than just money. He is strongly in favor of growing the charter school movement as well as parental choice in education in the form of school choice. Pipkin says three things must happen to ensure that Maryland's children and grandchildren get a good education: "the government must provide the resources that public schools need in order to succeed; we must hold them accountable for the resources that we give them; and if they fail, we need to give parents the opportunity to send their children to better schools regardless of economic status."

MISSOURI

Kit Bond	R
Nancy Farmer	D

With the country and its candidates focused on homeland security and the war in Iraq, many senatorial candidates have spent little time campaigning on their education issues. But that's not the case for the veteran politicians in the Show Me State, where a fight over school funding between three-term Senator and former Governor Kit Bond and his Democratic opponent, State Treasurer and former state representative Nancy Farmer, has made top billing in the campaign – and plenty of headlines, too.

Farmer accuses the sitting Senator of consistently voting against funding for Missouri schools – boasting that she will make funding NCLB her first priority when elected. She has the support of the teachers' union in her fight. But Bond fights back with a laundry list of education improvements he has sought during his tenure inside the Beltway, including introducing the Early Childhood Development Act in partnership with Democratic Senator John Kerry. Bond is a long time supporter of school choice, consistently voting for incentives for states to enact such programs. The candidates have found some common ground on charter schools, though – both want to encourage charter school growth with a greater investment in facilities for new schools.

NEVADA

Harry Reid	D
Richard Ziser	R

Incumbent Democrat Harry Reid wants Nevada's schools to be more "international," while Republican contender Richard Ziser says schools should focus on being "accountable" above all else.

Reid, a longtime business leader, has a vision for the state's schools that includes early foreign language classes and a boosted international student exchange program. The NEA supports the Senator in his bid to continue that vision another term. Reformers warm to Ziser, who is not only a fan of more accountability, but believes competition stimulates improvement in public schools and "provides access to better education immediately." He warns against "ever increasing" school funds because those funds are "rarely accompanied by real, effective accountability."

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Judd Gregg R
Doris Haddock D



Republican incumbent Judd Gregg faces an unusual opponent, 94-year-old Doris “Granny D” Haddock, in his quest for a new term. Gregg’s track record as chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee has positioned him among the nation’s leading education reformers. He is a proud sponsor of NCLB and a leader in the battle for school choice in the District of Columbia. He serves as co-chair of National Charter Schools Week and consistently supports the strength and growth of the movement.

In strong contrast, Haddock is strongly opposed to all forms of school choice. She has made it clear in her campaign that school funding is the answer to education reform – referring to a lack of school funding in this country as “a crisis.” What she intends to do with increased funding is unclear.

NEW YORK

Charles Schumer D
Howard Mills R

Polar opposites. There is no better way to describe the education visions of incumbent Senator “Chuck” Schumer and his Republican opponent State Assemblyman Howard Mills.

Schumer boasts that his kids attend New York public schools. And he has made it his top education priority to ensure that more money is put into the system. He is particularly committed to increased funds for modernization and facilities upgrades. Mills, on the other hand, believes that an endless flow of money will do little to fix a broken system. He demands results from the nation’s financial investment in schools – proposing strong oversight of school district spending practices. And he wants to use some of that money to reward teachers based on performance. Similarly, the two candidates battle on education choice. Mills believes that charter schools and choice programs are smart strategies to ensure that all kids – especially underprivileged kids – have access to opportunities. He gets an “A” for effort. Schumer, on the other hand, vows to fight choice “tooth and nail.” And be assured – he has 100 percent NEA support in that fight.

NORTH CAROLINA

Erskine Bowles D
Richard Burr R

As vice presidential contender John Edwards gives up his post as North Carolina’s junior senator, he leaves behind a heated battle between Erskine Bowles, White House Chief of Staff under President Clinton, and Congressman Richard Burr.

Burr believes that NCLB is “landmark legislation” that has already gone a long way in empowering schools to reach their goals. He is a proponent of forgiving teachers’ student loans as an incentive to get them in the classroom, seeks to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, and is committed to “results-oriented policy that focuses on flexibility and accountability.” Burr is an ally for school choice – affirming that school choice, charter schools, and home schooling options all “put the needs of children ahead of the one-size-fits all mandates of the education bureaucracy.”

NORTH CAROLINA (CONTINUED)

Bowles, who lost the 2002 race for Senate to Elizabeth Dole, strives to increase funding for North Carolina schools, shrink class sizes, and boost access to technology in the classroom. He wants more money for NCLB, more money for Head Start, and more money for teachers. These proposals put him squarely in the camp of the status quo on education, a place where reformers fear to tread.

NORTH DAKOTA

Byron Dorgan D
Mike Liffbrig R

Byron Dorgan and his Republican counterpart Mike Liffbrig both believe that NCLB presents many challenges to North Dakota's rural school districts. But that's about the only thing they agree upon.

NEA-backed Dorgan believes more money is the solution to the state's ailing schools. He sponsored the Rural Education Initiative that enabled rural school districts to combine funds and supports dramatic increases in NCLB funding. The NEA supports him 100 percent.

Reform-minded Liffbrig, the owner of a mediation firm by profession, takes a different approach. He is clear that money alone "is not the answer." He supports pay-for-performance for teachers, alternative routes to certification, and the expansion of charter school options for parents. School safety initiatives also top his list of priorities, as well as programs that put parents in the driver's seat for their children's education.

OHIO

George Voinovich R
Eric Fingerhut D

All eyes are on Ohio this year as the presidential candidates remain neck-and-neck in what promises to be a key swing state. The Buckeye State's senate race, on the other hand, leaves little to surprise. Senator Voinovich holds a commanding lead over his Democratic rival Eric Fingerhut.

Voinovich has the backing of both the NFIB and the U.S. Chamber in his reelection bid. He is a long-time ally of the school reform community, having forged the way for Cleveland's school choice plan when he was Ohio's governor and remained steadfast in his support for charter schools. In addition to expanding options for parents, Voinovich advocates for better access to technology, new school construction, and increased flexibility at the local level.

Former member of Congress and current State Senator Fingerhut has made squashing school choice his number one priority. And he isn't all talk – he put his opposition to action with a "no" vote on legislation that would have provided more facilities options for the state's charter schools. As for what Fingerhut does support, he lists teacher training, a universal pre-school program, and an increased focus on athletics and the arts.

The national AFT and the local teachers' union have put the weight of their support behind Fingerhut.

OKLAHOMA

Brad Carson	D
Tom Coburn	R



Brad Carson and Tom Coburn have both spent time representing the Sooner State in the U.S. House of Representatives. The race to see who will snatch the senate job is neck and neck. Carson has the support of the NEA in the battle, thanks to his demands for more money for Oklahoma schools and distaste for school choice programs. He seeks to boost the state’s vocational programs and ensure teachers are spending their own money to supply their classrooms. Carson was part of a New Democrat coalition a number of years ago that proclaimed its support for charter schools, but has taken no substantive action to help expand charters.

Coburn cast his vote in Congress to ensure D.C. parents had options and he supports legislation that calls for tax credits to help parents pay for non-public schools. But the true focus of Coburn’s education agenda is local control. He is an opponent of NCLB and sponsored legislation that would ensure that 95 percent of federal education dollars remain in local classrooms. He believes “parents, not federal bureaucrats, should direct children’s education.”

OREGON

Ron Wyden	D
Al King	R

To their credit, Oregon’s Senatorial candidates have not limited their plans for improving schools to a broad call for more money. Wyden joins many of his Democratic colleagues in proposing increased funding for NCLB, but he’s moved beyond that request to work with the U.S. Department of Education to adjust regulations to support rural communities in meeting new standards. Wyden is a long-time opponent of school choice and has the full support of both his local teachers’ union and the NEA. But Oregon insiders are more confident in the Senator’s support for charters. In 1999, he sponsored legislation that would double funding for the federal charter school program.

Republican challenger Al King, a rancher and former GOP state chairman, believes in “accessible choice for all parents and students.” For King, that includes charter schools, school choice and equity for home schoolers. As far as money is concerned, King says increases in funds have not translated into student success.

PENNSYLVANIA

Joe Hoeffel	D
Arlen Specter	R

After surviving a tumultuous primary campaign, Senator Arlen Specter, Pennsylvania’s senior senator now faces a tough test from Congressman Joe Hoeffel in his pursuit of another term.

Hoeffel has the endorsement and 100 percent rating from the NEA and its local union counterparts (even though in past years Specter could expect some support from the union). Hoeffel seeks increased funding for NCLB and school facilities, although it is unclear whether or not that aid would include charter schools. Hoeffel is an avid opponent of school choice programs, but is softer on charters – joining other “New Democrats” in vocal support of the model.

PENNSYLVANIA (CONTINUED)

Specter is chairman of the Senate's Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. He is consistent in his support for charter schools, but has shown alarming inconsistencies on school choice. He voted in favor of the D.C. Scholarship Fund in 1997, but switched his vote to a "no" this year. Specter supported the "Ed-Flex" legislation to provide for more flexibility in exchange for accountability and a federal grant for teacher training program.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Inez Tenenbaum D
Jim DeMint R

Few races in the country feature candidates with such stark differences of opinion as the race for the open U.S. Senate seat in the Palmetto State – and as much national attention. Republican Congressman Jim DeMint is a strong advocate of innovation in education through the promotion of charter schools and wide-ranging school choice programs. In his response to CER's Survey, DeMint declared his support for additional start-up funds for charters and additional options for parents whose children are in failing schools. He says: "We must force our education system to fit how our children learn, not force our children to fit the education system."

Democratic nominee Tenenbaum, currently serving as South Carolina's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, is firm in her opposition to charters and school choice and has adopted education positions mirroring those of the education establishment. To Tenenbaum's credit, she did help the state embrace the popular Teacher Advancement Program, but it's small and not likely to upset the applecart. She lists parent and community involvement near the top of her list of education priorities. Also on the list – early child development, "quality teachers," and more funding for NCLB. The state's PTA, often allied with the unions, is with this candidate 100 percent.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Tom Daschle D
John Thune R

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle has become a major player on the national political scene. But folks back home in South Dakota worry that he's lost touch with his home state – setting the stage for former Congressman John Thune to challenge Daschle in one of the tightest races in the country.

In his role as minority leader, Daschle was instrumental in the passage of NCLB, but now argues that it's money that will make the program work. Daschle supports distance learning, reduced class sizes, and teacher training. He believes the federal government should help school districts with urgent facilities repair and renovation needs. But despite these priorities, education reformers were made nervous by the Senator's recent appearance on Tim Russert's "Meet the Press." Daschle spoke for an hour on his priorities for South Dakota, and failed to mention education even once. Republican challenger and former Congressman John



Thune wants to ensure that the “most is made” of federal funds directed to education. In Congress, Thune voted for legislation authorizing school choice. His rural education initiative, helping smaller school districts, was included in NCLB. The NEA tips their hat to the powerful incumbent Daschle in this race.

UTAH

Bob Bennett	R
Paul Van Dam	D

Republican Senator Bob Bennett is among only a handful of Republican senators who voted against NCLB. A federalist to the core, Bennett fought the bill to keep local control of Utah’s school. But he voted “yes” on choice for D.C.’s parents and believes “we should have a system that funds the student, not the system.” He says school choice is not a threat to anything but the status quo.

Paul Van Dam, a Salt Lake County District Attorney, also wants to see more local control over schools. But he takes a decidedly different stance on choice – opposing school choice programs and proposing restrictive measures on charters. He sees no role for private companies in improving his state’s schools. “What Utah will always need, because Utah always will have more kids, is more money,” he said in CER’s Survey.

VERMONT

Patrick Leahy	D
Jack McMullen	R

Democratic incumbent Leahy enjoys the full support of his local teachers’ union and the NEA. It could be his commitment to nutrition legislation that “keeps milk on the school lunch menu,” but it is more likely his strong opposition to NCLB. Leahy also voted “no” on school choice for D.C. parents. Leahy seeks to boost young women’s participation in school athletics, as well as to promote increased international exchange programs.

McMullen, a Harvard Law School graduate and former Naval officer, has his own concerns about implementing NCLB in his rural state, though he is supportive of the goal of the initiative. He believes that teachers should be held accountable for student performance and paid accordingly. The best teachers, he says, are those who know their subject well. He supports school choice and believes charters would make a smart alternative for Vermont (home to no charter options today). Finally, McMullen discourages people from leaning on money as the answer – Vermont is ranked 3rd in spending “with very little results.”

WASHINGTON

Patty Murray D

George Nethercutt R



Senior Senator Patty Murray is a former school teacher, school board president, and PTA member – but she hardly represents the rank and file. The NEA and Washington’s local union have thrown their full support to Murray in her bid for reelection against outgoing Republican Congressman George Nethercutt. Her top priority? Money. She seeks increased funding for NCLB, IDEA, Head Start, and Even Start. No word on how she intends to put that money to work for kids in the Evergreen State. Also, Murray voted “no” on school choice for D.C. parents and consistently finds opportunities to publicly oppose the model.

Nethercutt appears more focused on outcomes, drawing attention to his role in the passage of NCLB and the stricter accountability it embodies. He also voted “yes” on “Ed-Flex” legislation that would give schools more flexibility in exchange for greater accountability. Nethercutt puts parent involvement above all else, but tends to be somewhat noncommittal on reforms that, in fact, enhance parent involvement. He is only lukewarm in his support for charter schools – an issue on his constituents’ ballot this fall. Nethercutt voted yes on choice for D.C. parents, because he embraces programs that respect “local decisions on school choice.”

WISCONSIN

Russ Feingold D

Tim Michels R

Republican Tim Michels believes parents, not bureaucrats, should decide who should educate kids. School choice has a spot at the very top of this Republican’s list of education priorities. The popular Wisconsin businessman challenges his state to “maintain the innovation progress” that has given his state “a leg up nationally.”

Democratic incumbent Feingold voted against opportunity scholarships for D.C. parents earlier this year. He also cast a “no” vote for NCLB and teamed up with Independent Senator Jim Jeffords to sponsor the Student Testing Flexibility Act that seeks to roll back some NCLB testing and accountability requirements. Increased school funding is also a key component of Feingold’s plan. He demands more money for Head Start and public school facilities. The NEA is clear on this race – Feingold is their man.



CANDIDATES FOR STATE EDUCATION CHIEF

Thank goodness state school chiefs are not the only links in the chain for education reform. This year's stable of contenders provides little in the way of strong reform leadership, and mostly represents an embrace of the status quo.

INDIANA

Susan Williams	D
Suellen Reed	R

In an unusual twist, the Democratic candidate for The Hoosier State's top education post, former City-County Council Democratic leader Susan Williams, says she will resign if elected this fall to force the General Assembly to move the office from being popularly elected to being appointed by the governor. While not opposed to changing the office to an appointed position, long-time State Superintendent Suellen Reed would prefer to have the General Assembly act first to make the change before tendering any resignation.

No matter the official status of the job, Reed says she'll put teacher quality and a strong testing program at the top of her list of education priorities. She believes schools should "explore all avenues to involve parents." But when it comes to truly empowering parents, she falls short. She is lukewarm in her support for charter schools – grudgingly supporting GOP gubernatorial nominee Mitch Daniel's plan to expand charter schools in the state – and she adamantly opposes school choice programs.

Indiana insiders say Williams would be more likely to support the charter school community. The state's Democratic party has backed this former teacher who has built her campaign around a new full-day kindergarten program.

MONTANA

Linda McCulloch	D
Bob Anderson	R

Democrat incumbent Linda McCulloch eschews reform and says increased funding is the answer to Montana's education woes. But the 20-year classroom veteran offers few tangible strategies on how to put that money to work to reach her top goals of tackling the dropout rate and ensuring every child can read. McCulloch claims that NCLB has wrestled control from the state, so she, like her union-based supporters, opposes the law.

Bob Anderson has combined both conventional and reform-minded proposals in his second bid for the state post. Teachers should be paid more, he says – but they should also support an extension to the traditional 180-day school year. Anderson believes Montana's kids need more time in the classroom to prepare to compete in a global economy.

NORTH CAROLINA

June Atkinson D
Bill Fletcher R

Republican Bill Fletcher says he wants to put proven business strategies to work for North Carolina's struggling schools, and if elected will overhaul state spending. He told his local newspapers that public schools must be "effective and efficient." He opposes a new state lottery that would pour more money into a broken system. He wants to hold leaders accountable for financial mismanagement, reward teachers financially based on performance, and provide school leaders with the flexibility they need to get real results. But while Fletcher offers tough rhetoric meant to appeal to budget-conscious voters, insiders say it's just that. Fletcher has publicly denounced charter schools on a number of occasions – despite the fact that they provide the very attributes of accountability and flexibility he touts on all of his campaign materials.

June Atkinson, a retired administrator with the state Department of Education, does support the creation of a new state lottery to fund schools. She believes increased funding across the board, combined with teacher training, and serious amendments to NCLB are the answer to improving the state's schools. But reformers beware – local union leaders agree with her and have given Atkinson their full support.

NORTH DAKOTA

Wayne Sanstead N/A
Keith Jacobson N/A

Long-time superintendent Wayne Sanstead revealed in his CER candidate survey that money is his top priority for reforming North Dakota schools. And he opposes reform strategies such as charter schools and school choice options. He can be characterized as a moderate supporter of NCLB and he credits the Act for keeping the state focused on continuous improvement.

While Republican candidate Keith Jacobson opposes President George W. Bush's NCLB Initiative, most North Dakota Republicans support him. The New Salem principal says NCLB inspired him to throw his hat in the ring for the state's top education job because "we know North Dakota best." Among Jacobson's top priorities are strengthening the dialogue (yawn) between school leaders and state lawmakers and boosting technological training at small schools across the state. With test data showing 64 percent of the state's eighth graders not proficient in mathematics on their 2003 NAEP assessment, some may wonder why both candidates appear to be ignoring the need for substantive reform.



WASHINGTON

Terry Bergeson	N/A
Judith Billings	N/A



Student testing is at the heart of the debate between current Superintendent Terry Bergeson and former Superintendent-turned candidate Judith Billings. Bergeson believes that the relatively new Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test is a great indicator of student progress – a position her opponent Billings calls “an obsession.” Billings believes that WASL carries too much weight and that more funding is, in fact, the solution to the state’s education woes. And the local teachers’ union agrees – having put its full support behind the former high school principal.

Charter schools are proving to be a key issue as well. Whether or not to allow charter schools in Washington will be on the ballot this fall, sparked by union opposition to the modest bill that passed earlier in 2004. Billings has made it clear that she opposes the model. Bergeson is supportive, but barely. She often dodges questions regarding the referenda on charters by looking to “voters to decide.” For reformers, this one’s a draw.



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