



THE Center for Education Reform



MANDATE FOR CHANGE

a bold agenda for the incoming government

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**The Center for Education Reform
changes laws, minds and cultures to allow
good schools to flourish.**

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INTRODUCTION



America, at its core, is a country founded on a revolutionary idea—that the just powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed. It is we, the people, who institute our government; it is we, the people, who enumerate the powers that our government shall possess; and it is we, the people, who can abolish the forms of government to which we have become accustomed—whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends.

Mandate for Change is an effort led by the Center for Education Reform to set a bold agenda for the incoming government. While others propose that the global economic crisis and a matrix of threats to our national security must lead the Obama Administration's long list of priorities, we argue that fixing public education is hands down the most leveraged domestic policy opportunity of our time. No other investment available can simultaneously enhance the workforce of the future, help rebuild the infrastructure of the present, and seek to wipe out the civil rights injustices of the recent past. If we fail to fix our failing schools, however, if we fail to *replace* our public education system, which as a whole is itself monumentally broken, we, the people, may soon find that we are fundamentally unequipped to govern ourselves let alone to provide governance to others we thought in greater need.

Mandate for Change does not spend a lot of time diagnosing the causes of our current afflictions. There are libraries of research to confirm our ailments: after spending more than \$500 billion a year educating children ages 5–18, we have math and science scores among the worst in the developed world; our literacy rates among the poor are worse than those of many undeveloped nations; our competency in basic subjects, among rich and poor alike, lags well behind what a far simpler system achieved 150 years ago. Instead, these essays move immediately to prescribe a five-part cure:

federal accountability, transparency, charter schools, school choice, and improvements in teacher quality. Each of these five themes is taken up in a separate essay that aims to simply and succinctly present what we need to do and what we need to avoid. The challenge at hand—as we have accepted it in these pages—is to focus on what matters most and to provide actionable recommendations that leaders in government can move today to implement.

The political transition of the moment creates an enormous opportunity to effect positive change that can be established in law.

Mandate for Change does not attempt to marshal reams of data in support of its claims. That has been done elsewhere. For more than 15 years the Center for Education Reform has amassed one of the largest national repositories of secondary literature on school performance and itself has provided access to the most authoritative commentary on the legal and legislative remedies required to advance fundamental reform. Rather than rehearse that research and those remedies here, we have assembled five nationally respected authorities and asked them to draw from their own personal expertise after working for decades in the field of public education reform. The result is this brief monograph—by design accessible to all—that yields five basic conclusions outlining what is required to fundamentally improve the future prospects of the children in our nation’s public schools.

Much more than an invitation to continue the conversation, *Mandate for Change* is primarily a call to action. Seven out of eight legislators taking office in January of 2009 are new to their position or are newly in power. This political transition creates an enormous opportunity to effect positive change that can be established in law.

There are more than 8,000 federal and state legislators in America. All of them will personally receive this monograph. We understand that many of them may be new to the urgency of this message and that almost all of them will be new to the new demands of their office, but above all else we urge them to act on what they read here.

To help us all understand the importance of this opportunity and to help us communicate the urgency of this message more broadly, we also are sending these essays to more than 2,500 members of the print, television, and online news media—especially to those who cover education and to journalists with expertise in educational policy. For them, *Mandate for Change* is an open invitation to apply whatever public pressure is needed to give our country’s schoolchildren the public schools they deserve.

To be clear, Americans are at their best when they act on the fundamental principles upon which this great nation was founded. Self-government requires a well educated public. Now is the time to act in our own defense and provide for our future security. Now is the time to tell our new government exactly what changes in public education are required for this great country and its people to thrive.

About the editor

Samuel Casey Carter is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Education Reform where he helps define and advance the Center’s education reform mission nationwide. Before coming to CER, Carter was the president of National Heritage Academies, a charter school management company that operates 56 schools in six states where he oversaw corporate strategy, communications, and the implementation of the company’s educational program.

Carter is also the author of *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*, a book on the effective practices of high-performing schools that refuse to make poverty an excuse for academic failure. In addition to *No Excuses*, Carter has edited three other books including *Core Virtues*, a literature-based character education program for parents and teachers of elementary school students. His articles, essays, and columns have appeared in over 180 newspapers and magazines. He and his wife Suzanne live in Washington, D.C. with their three daughters Kirby, Casey, and Lucy.