

2004 Republican Party Platform On Education

A Safer World and a More Hopeful America

EDUCATION: NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Public education, access for every child to an excellent education, is a foundation of a free, civil society. The children who enter schools today will leave as young adults, full of dreams for the future. They will soon become the scientists and researchers who make great discoveries, the engineers and mathematicians who build our communities, the doctors and nurses who heal and comfort the sick, the teachers who will educate the next generation, the leaders who transform government, the poets, artists, and writers who entertain and inspire. Every child deserves a first-rate education, because every child holds infinite potential, and we should give them every opportunity to reach it.

We believe there is an inseparable link between a vibrant economy and a high-quality education system. It takes a vibrant economy to provide the tax base necessary to fund a high-quality education system. Equally, it takes a quality education system to provide the highly skilled labor force necessary to meet the demands of a growing, vibrant economy.

Strong schools will also produce a workforce with the skills to compete in the 21st century economy. We must have citizens capable of conceiving the next generation of new technologies and innovations, mastering the art of analyzing problems and crafting their solutions. Education is the key to prosperity and fulfillment – the foundation on which all other success is built.

On just his fourth day in office, President Bush presented the No Child Left Behind initiative to Congress. Less than a year later, he secured an overwhelming bipartisan majority to pass the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It was the most significant overhaul of federal education policy since 1965. And it became a promise kept to parents, students, teachers, and every American.

The law is based on four fundamental pillars:

- Ensuring stronger accountability for student achievement, for all children
- Encouraging education methods that work
- Providing flexibility and control to states and local communities
- Giving parents more information about the quality of their children's schools and offering them choices and resources for their children's education

Results are now measured on the basis of student achievement rather than simply dollars spent. Students are benefiting from education reforms that set high academic standards,

encourage strong parental involvement, recognize the role of excellent teachers, foster safe and orderly classrooms, and establish a commitment to teaching the basics of reading and math.

With this success, Republicans have transformed the debate on education. We are the Party parents can trust to improve schools and provide opportunity for all children, in every neighborhood, regardless of background or income. We are the party willing to embrace new ideas and put them to the test. Americans agree that the status quo in education is no longer acceptable. We have challenged low expectations and poor achievement, and we are seeing results.

Now is the time to extend the progress we've made. The No Child Left Behind Act is already showing gains in elementary school, as student achievement scores for fourth- and eighth-graders have increased in classrooms across America. Our next mission is to take the reforms that we know are working in elementary schools and apply them up and down the education ladder – starting in early childhood education, so that children enter school ready to learn, and finishing in high school, so that every young adult who graduates has the skills he or she needs to succeed in the 21st century economy. For too long, the value of a high school diploma has declined as students leave school without even basic skills like reading and math, let alone the advanced math and science skills the modern workforce demands. We pledge to bring real reform to high schools. Thanks to President Bush's vision and the success of the No Child Left Behind Act, we have a track record worthy of Americans' trust.

LOCAL CONTROL

We recognize that under the American Constitutional system, education is a state, local, and family responsibility, not a federal obligation. Since over 90 percent of public school funding is state and local, not federal, it is obvious that state and local governments must assume most of the responsibility to improve the schools, and the role of the federal government must be limited as we return control to parents, teachers, and local school boards.

HISTORIC LEVELS OF FUNDING

President Bush and Congressional Republicans have provided the largest increase in federal education funding in history and the highest percentage gain since the 1960s. Support for elementary and secondary education has had the largest increase in any single Presidential term since the 1960s – an increase of nearly 50 percent since 2001. The President and Congress are particularly focused on programs for America's neediest

students, including minorities and children with special needs. With this increased funding comes a new focus on achievement and results.

HIGH STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The President and Republicans in Congress recognize that states and local communities are most directly responsible for the quality of education in their schools. That is why the No Child Left Behind Act stipulates that the states, not the federal government, develop an accountability plan that will work best for them. Since President Bush signed NCLB into law, all states have developed an accountability plan of assessments, graduation rates, and other key indicators of student achievement for all individual students and groups of students. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, every child counts. No child will be hidden in a maze of numbers. If some children are struggling while others succeed, we will praise success and deliver help to students who need it.

READING

Our Party believes, as does the President, that reading is the new civil right. Every child must be able to read by the end of the third grade. The President and Congressional Republicans have taken important steps to help every student achieve that goal. The Reading First initiative brings scientifically based reading instruction, including phonics, to children in the early grades. Over \$1.4 billion in funding for reading programs provides training for teachers and materials for children. In addition, since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, states have received additional funds for early childhood reading efforts.

OPTIONS FOR PARENTS

The Republican Party strongly supports school choice, because choice creates competition and competition puts the focus on quality. President Bush, Republican governors, and members of Congress have worked to expand parental choice and encourage competition by providing parents with information on their child's school, increasing the number of charter schools, and expanding education savings accounts for use from kindergarten through college.

Under NCLB, states and school districts publish report cards showing how well students are achieving so communities and parents can know how well their schools are doing. Parents of children in schools identified as needing improvement can choose another public school or get tutoring or other help for their child. President Bush and the Republican Congress enacted the D.C. School Choice initiative – the first federally

funded school choice demonstration program. We commend the President and Congress for making DC's schoolchildren the most important special interest in education improvement. And we support state efforts to expand school choice, as well as the President's call to provide funding for new and existing charter schools, including assistance for school facilities. We believe that competition between schools is an effective option to improve the educational benefits for our children. The Republican Party supports the efforts of parents who choose faith-based and other nonpublic school options for their children.

HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

We are beginning to see success as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act at the elementary level, and now we must improve our high schools so that every graduate is prepared for the rigors of college, for the best jobs of the 21st century economy, or for military service. President Bush has proposed a number of initiatives to improve math and science education, help striving readers, and raise standards for high schools.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

Research confirms what every parent knows to be true through commonsense and experience – a good teacher makes all the difference in a child's education. The No Child Left Behind Act set the goal of having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by the 2005-2006 school year. States have been provided flexibility and resources to make sure teachers have the skills and tools to be successful with all children. These needed reforms are backed by historic levels of funding for teacher quality initiatives and support for teachers, including training, recruitment incentives, loan forgiveness, and tax relief.

We must also work to reduce the barriers that are keeping qualified professionals from entering the classroom by expanding alternative pathways to teacher certification – programs like Troops to Teachers, which helps former military personnel become classroom teachers; and Transition to Teaching, which provides training for people who want to become teachers and encourages states to develop and expand alternative routes to teacher licensure and certification.

Every teacher and every student deserves a safe classroom in which to work and learn. The No Child Left Behind Act ensures that teachers and other school professionals can undertake reasonable actions to maintain order and discipline in the classroom without the fear of litigation. The law provides civil immunity in any state court and limits the financial liability of teachers, instructors, principals, administrators, and other education professionals for actions taken to maintain discipline, order, or control in the school or classroom.

HEAD START AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

We support the President's "Good Start, Grow Smart" initiative, which strengthens Head Start by increasing accountability in the program so that students start kindergarten with the early skills they need. It also includes the Early Reading First initiative, designed to improve existing early education programs to prepare young children to succeed in school, especially those from low-income families. States should be able to coordinate preschool programs with Head Start programs in exchange for meeting certain accountability requirements.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community colleges play a vital role in not only cultivating citizens for the 21st century, but also equipping them with the essential skills and training needed for jobs in the new economy. Because they are so adaptable and accessible, community colleges are increasingly critical providers of job training, both for degree-seekers and for workers seeking to retool, refine, and broaden their skills. We support the President's High-Growth Job Training Initiative, which has provided seed money to fund job training partnerships between community colleges and local high-growth industries.

HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY

Republicans are working to ensure that college is affordable and accessible for America's low- and middle-income families through increased funding of grants, low-interest student loans, and tax breaks for working families. As a result of Republican leadership, total student aid for higher education has increased to a historic \$73 billion proposed for 2005. Next year, almost 10 million students and parents will receive one or more grants, loans, or work-study awards.

The President has requested record levels of Pell Grant funding. These grants will help an estimated 5.3 million low-income students pay for higher education – one million more students than when President Bush and Vice President Cheney came to office. Under a new Enhanced Pell Grant proposal, low-income students who take a rigorous high school curriculum – the kind of curriculum that will best prepare them for success in college – will be eligible to receive an additional \$1,000 per year.

To ensure that America remains the world leader in the innovation economy – and to ensure that America's graduates have the training they need to compete for the best jobs of the 21st century – President Bush proposes to expand opportunities for math and science education in colleges and universities. Needy students studying math and science will be eligible to receive additional college aid.

Republicans have made Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) a priority. For more than a century, HBCUs and HSIs have played a vital role in providing opportunities for excellence in higher education to millions of African American and Hispanic students. Today, their mission continues, and it deserves our support. We applaud President Bush for fulfilling his pledge to increase funding for HBCUs and HSIs by 30 percent since 2001.

PROTECTING THE EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS

As stated earlier, we applaud efforts to promote school choice initiatives that give parents more control over their children's education. By the same token, we defend the option for home schooling and call for vigilant enforcement of laws designed to protect family rights and privacy in education. Children should not be compelled to answer offensive or intrusive questionnaires. We will continue to work for the return of voluntary school prayer to our schools and will strongly enforce the Republican legislation that guarantees equal access to school facilities by student religious groups. We strongly support voluntary student-initiated prayer in school without governmental interference. We strongly disagree with the Supreme Court's rulings against student-initiated prayer.