

Presidential Hopefuls Weigh In on Education

Sen. **John McCain**, the Republican presidential nominee, and **Sen. Barack Obama**, the Democratic nominee, take sharply contrasting views on a number of key education policy issues.

McCain

No Child Left Behind

Has promised to “build on the lessons” of the law and keep its “emphasis on standards and accountability,” Sen. McCain’s campaign Web site says. The Arizona senator proposes to make it easier for students to receive free tutoring if they attend schools that do not make adequate yearly progress for three years.

Said in a September speech that “the goals of this law were the right ones.” But Sen. Obama added that the law has been inadequately funded and has focused too narrowly on the results of standardized tests. The Illinois senator has proposed increasing the amount of funding for the overall program and particularly to improve the quality of tests so they measure higher-order thinking skills.

Teacher Quality

Would change the teacher-quality section of the NCLB law to encourage alternative certification; provide bonuses to teachers who work in schools with low performance and those who teach mathematics, science, and other areas with shortages of qualified teachers; and give principals money to reward teachers who increase student performance.

Promises to “recruit, prepare, retain, and reward” teachers, his campaign Web site says. The senator would establish scholarships to pay for the undergraduate, graduate, or alternative certification of teachers. He would start a residency program to recruit 30,000 new teachers through an intensive process that combines coursework with working closely with a current teacher. He also would finance programs to pay bonuses to teachers who act as mentors or work in hard-to-staff schools in urban or rural areas.

Federal Spending

Wants to freeze all domestic discretionary spending, including for education, until he could conduct a top-to-bottom review of federal programs.

Has proposed \$18 billion in new spending on preschool and K-12 programs, including a new teacher-training initiative and \$10 billion in new money to help states develop preschool programs.

School Choice

Supports an expansion of the federally financed voucher program in the District of Columbia, which allows students to attend private schools, including religious schools. He would boost annual appropriations to at least \$20 million for the program from the current \$13 million. Sen. McCain has also proposed \$250 million to provide scholarships for needy students nationwide to enroll in online courses.

Supports public school choice, but is opposed to federally financed vouchers for use at private schools. Sen. Obama proposes to double federal funding for charter schools, to about \$400 million per year.

Prekindergarten

Calls for federally supported preschool programs, including Head Start, to adopt measurable standards to determine students’ school readiness. He would like to bring pay for Head Start and preschool teachers closer into line with that of their K-12 counterparts.

Would spend the additional \$10 billion a year in preschool funding to expand Early Head Start and for such programs as grants to help states establish health and education programs for pregnant women and for children from birth to age 5.

Higher Education

Supports consolidating federal student-financial-aid programs to make the application process easier to understand. He has also proposed simplifying higher education tax benefits and making information about colleges and universities more accessible to parents.

Has proposed a new, \$4,000 “American Opportunity Tax Credit.” Students receiving the credit would be required to perform 100 hours of community service. He also promises to simplify the process of applying for federal financial aid.

<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/19ce50b5-daa8-4795-b92d-92bd0d985bca.htm>

<http://www.barackobama.com/issues/education/>

Obama