

**REV. SHARPTON AND SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR KLEIN JOIN
MAYOR BOOKER, FORMER GOVERNOR ROMER, AND OTHER
NATIONAL LEADERS TO LAUNCH EDUCATION EQUALITY PROJECT**

*New National Education Reform Coalition Calls Fixing Public Education the
Civil Rights Struggle of the 21st Century, Aims to Challenge National Leaders to Work for Change*

Reverend Al Sharpton and New York City Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein joined with elected officials, civil rights leaders, and education reformers from across the country today to announce the launch of the Education Equality Project, a new organization focused on transforming America's public schools and educational outcomes for high-needs students. The Project will challenge politicians, public officials, educators, union leaders, and others to view fixing public schools as the foremost civil rights issue of the early 21st Century. It will focus America's attention on its highest needs students, who—54 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*—still receive far less educational opportunity and often struggle and fail in school. In the coming months, the Project will seek to focus the presidential candidates on educational equality, hosting forums at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. The founding members of the Project announced their new effort at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

Founding Project members include elected officials, civil rights leaders, and education reformers. The 15 people who have agreed to the Project's "principles" (attached) include:

- **Andres A. Alonso**, *Baltimore City Public Schools CEO*
- **Cory A. Booker**, *Newark, NJ Mayor*
- **Geoffrey Canada**, *Harlem Children's Zone President and CEO*
- **Kevin P. Chavous**, *attorney, author, and national school reform leader*
- **Arne Duncan**, *Chicago Public Schools CEO*
- **Howard Fuller**, *Former Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent, Education Professor and Director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University*
- **Peter Groff**, *Colorado Senate President*
- **Kati Haycock**, *The Education Trust President*
- **Joel I. Klein**, *New York City Schools Chancellor, Education Equality Project Co-chairman*
- **Marc Lampkin**, *Strong American Schools – ED in '08 Executive Director*
- **James Mtume**, *KISS FM Radio "Open Line" Host*
- **Michelle Rhee**, *Washington, D.C. Schools Chancellor*
- **The Honorable Roy Romer**, *Strong American Schools – ED in '08 Chairman*
- **Andrew Rotherham**, *Education Sector Co-founder and Co-director*

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Joel I. Klein
Chancellor

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- **Rev. Al Sharpton**, *National Action Network President, Education Equality Project Co-chairman*
- **Joe Williams**, *Democrats for Education Reform Executive Director*
- **J.C. Watts, Jr.**, *Strong American Schools – ED in '08 National Spokesman*

In the coming weeks, the Project co-chairmen will invite other leaders to join their coalition.

“Today, an unprecedented coalition has come together to confront the racial disparities in education and address the issue of education as a new civil rights movement to bring equality to education in this country,” Rev. Sharpton said. “We challenge both presidential candidates to recognize that we haven’t come close to achieving racial equality in educational opportunity.”

“It took our country 165 years to conclude that, under our Constitution, separate isn’t equal in education, but, still, 54 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, too often our schools fail our highest needs students,” Chancellor Klein said. “We need to get serious about giving all children the education they need to succeed. It won’t be easy—the status quo has lots of defenders—but it can be done and it is absolutely essential that we do it.”

“We stand at a historic time in the transformation of public education in Newark and the entire nation. We cannot let petty politics, crass opportunism, or personal agendas undermine our collective advance toward educational excellence,” said Newark, New Jersey, Mayor Cory A. Booker. “The time for ‘all deliberate speed’ ran out 50 years ago. We must unite as a people to drive to empower our nation’s youth with the mental, emotional, and spiritual strength to define their personal excellence and manifest our nation’s ideals of ‘liberty and justice for all.’”

“Our nation’s economy and individual family income is tied to improving our skills through education,” ED in ‘08 Chairman Roy Romer said. “Americans cannot afford to sit back and watch its schools fail our students. We need to raise expectations and opportunities for every single student, regardless of race, color, creed, or income. Most importantly, we need strong leaders to take initiative. Today, I am joining these influential leaders to call for change.”

“Nationally, our public education system is failing to provide our students with the skills they need to compete for the best jobs in the global workforce,” said former Congressman J.C. Watts, Jr., who serves as a spokesperson for ED in ‘08. “Too many of our students are not graduating from high school and too many who do graduate are not prepared to face the challenges of college, the workplace, or life. This crisis in education is destroying the foundation of our economic success and

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national prosperity. I am glad to join the bi-partisan coalition to sound the national alarm to improve our schools.”

“It is not sufficient to accept small islands of excellence in our urban school districts,” Dr. Andres A. Alonso, CEO of the Baltimore City Public Schools, said. “We must have the will as a society to ensure that every student, no matter where he is born, what color she is, or what parents he or she has can have access to the high-quality teachers and quality choices all children deserve. This is how we must define ourselves as a nation.”

“One of the first things I learned as the Washington, D.C. schools chancellor is that you can't base decisions on politics or what makes people happy,” Washington, D.C., Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee said. “You have to have the courage to make decisions on one thing—and one thing only—if it will help students learn. As a country, we cannot afford to protect a system that is failing. It's time for our national leaders to start putting students front and center and start transforming our country's public schools.”

“We're talking about a crisis that is entirely preventable, but only if leaders have the courage to say enough is enough,” Joe Williams, the Democrats for Education Reform Executive Director, said.

The Principles, signed by the Education Equality Project members, are attached. To find out more about the Education Equality Project, please visit www.nationalactionnetwork.net or e-mail education@nationalactionnetwork.net.

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