



Great Public Schools for Every Child

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Valuable NEA Political Endorsement Remains Up for Grabs

Democratic presidential candidates have yet to make their case for support from America's public school employees

Washington, DC— Political leaders and advocacy organizations are stumbling all over themselves to declare their choice to carry the Democratic standard in the presidential contest this fall. With the failure of Super Tuesday to define a clear-cut favorite for the Party's nomination however, the most valuable, and perhaps the most important, endorsement remains unclaimed by either Senator Barack Obama or Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The 3.2 million-member National Education Association, the nation's largest labor organization as well as the nation's largest professional association, remains on the sidelines in the competition for endorsements by the two remaining Democratic presidential candidates.

According to NEA President Reg Weaver, neither Obama nor Clinton has made the case that would earn them the Association's recommendation. "There have been dozens of debates but less than a handful of questions about the future role of the federal government in public education," says Weaver.

"Both Democratic candidates have strong records on education, but our members want to know about their visions and their plans for the future, and we haven't really heard that yet. If they haven't made education a central part of their campaigns, how can we feel confident that they will make education a central part of their administration?"

With both candidates scrambling to gather enough delegates to win the nomination, NEA is uniquely poised to play a major role in either campaign. Public school teachers have been near the top of the list of America's most admired spokespersons for decades, and according to the Harris polling firm, teachers' grades among the nation's "most admired professions" have improved by an average of 23 percentage points over the past 15 years. Along with millions of classroom teachers, the National Education Association also represents education support professionals, retired educators, higher education faculty, and college students preparing to enter the teaching profession.

"Our 3.2 million members live in every state, in every Congressional district, and in every precinct," says Weaver. "When you look at friends and family, we're talking five to six million potential voters, and most important, we're talking about tens of thousands of committed local campaign volunteers."

What must the candidates do to gain access to those NEA-member volunteers? According to the NEA's Weaver, the course of action is simple.

“For the past eight years, America’s public schools have been the victims of top down, manage by mandate federal education policy,” says Weaver. “We want to know how these candidates are going to reach out and build partnerships with America’s public school employees. Are they going to make No Child Left Behind a plan for lifting students up instead of letting them down? Will they provide reliable and adequate funding for federal education programs? How will they help state and local governments pay for improved facilities, new technology, better teacher training, and more help for those who need it most?”

“We want to know,” concludes Weaver, “how America’s public schools fit into this culture of change they talk so much about. And we want to hear them talk about it now - often – and loud.”

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The National Education Association is the nation’s largest professional organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.