



# CANDIDATE EDUCATION METER: MEASURING THE REFORM DEPTHS OF THOSE RUNNING FOR CONGRESS

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Dear Friend,

The Center for Education Reform is pleased to provide you with this tool to help you assess the positions and potential effectiveness of your elected officials and candidates — for state legislature, local school board, Congress or any other locally elected office that influences education reform. There are several ways you can approach candidates, and use this survey to maximize your effort:

First, take a one-on-one approach.

- Set up a meeting to interview the candidate
- Invite the candidate to tour your school
- Encourage candidates to use your school as a setting for media events to tout their commitment to education reform and promote your school as an example
- Be sure to extend invitations to all candidates and keep track of who responds and who does not
- Be assertive in requesting time with a candidate — remember you represent the front lines in the battle for well educated children and candidates want to hear from you

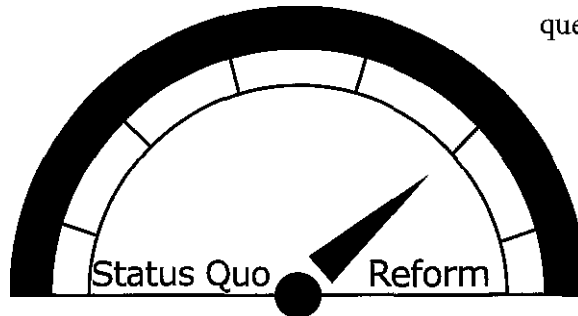
If an interview is not possible:

- Send the questionnaire with a cover letter requesting that candidates fill it out to inform the community of their positions (a sample letter follows).
- Personalize it to fit your candidate and your

community.

- Request a meeting with a member of the campaign staff (on larger campaigns)
- Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and your complete contact information to make it as easy as possible for candidates to respond.

You may use the questionnaire directly, or revise it to suit the needs of your state and community. You may also use it to create the basis for an interview, or to suggest questions appropriate for a public forum, debate, candidate appearance or radio call-in show.



Finally, let your group know the results — including the names of any candidates who may have refused to answer. Send the

results to the press, either through a press release, letter to the editor or a call to the local education reporter. Call us if you need help writing these. Our communications team is here to serve you.

And please send us your results. We'll compare answers to common questions with those from around the country and report to you on the progress of grassroots education reform.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Allen  
President

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THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM



## QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES: MEASURING COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION REFORM

**1** What are your three overall education priorities that, in a perfect world, you would accomplish during your tenure in office. How will you go about achieving them? Why are these the most important priorities?

**Background:** Credible candidates will have a clearly defined plan detailing what they want to accomplish during their time in office. A candidate who favors critical education reforms will present ideas to expand charter schools, enhance school choice options and create policies that allow parents to make the best decisions for their children.

**2** In order of priority, what should policymakers be most concerned about in schools?

- \_\_\_ Curriculum standards (i.e. reading, math, and other core subjects)
- \_\_\_ Construction
- \_\_\_ Class size
- \_\_\_ Teacher quality
- \_\_\_ Accountability/Strong Testing Program
- \_\_\_ School Choice (Charter Schools, Scholarships, etc.)

**3** What role does money play in improving schools?  
Please explain your answer.

**Background:** As governments at all levels distribute money for public education, some proposals would tie a school's funding directly to the number of children that it serves. This means that in states or localities allowing choice (including public school choice), the child that transfers to a different school essentially takes his funding with him. Money is obviously an important component in a successful school, but the freedom to provide innovative and creative solutions to education is far more critical.

**4** What role should parents play in the education process? How much control do you believe parents should have over which programs or schools their child is enrolled in?

**Background:** As consumers in the education marketplace, parents have the more important role in a child's education. Parents should have as many choices and much control as possible in the education of their children.

**5** Do you support charter schools? If yes, please list anything you would do to support them.

**Background:** In many states, parents, teachers and private groups can start "charter" schools, which are independent public schools, free from most rules, open to all interested students, and obligated to produce academic results set forth in performance contracts. There are currently more than 2,900 of these schools across the country.



- 6** Do you agree or disagree that the federal No Child Left Behind Act is good policy? Please explain your answer.

**Background:** The No child Left Behind Act and its implementation promises to be a hot-button issue in 2004. Since the enactment of the NCLB all schools must be accountable to the students they serve by quantifiable measures. If students fail to meet their state's standards, students gain the option of transferring out of lower performing schools or receiving supplemental services. If a school continues to fail to meet the standards, for all groups, there will be a personnel change and, ultimately, the school will be taken from district control and become a charter school.

- 7** Four states and the District of Columbia now fund school choice programs for parents whose children are at risk or in failing schools. Do you support such programs? If so, would you push a similar program in your area?

**Background:** In Milwaukee, up to 15,000 low-income children may choose to attend any public, private or parochial school at government expense (Milwaukee also has charter schools). Since the choice program began in 1991, the Milwaukee school board has enacted dramatic changes and created its own alternative schools. Additionally, in 2002 the U.S. Supreme Court opened the door for expanded school choice programs when they declared the Cleveland program constitutional.

- 8** Do you support opening public school classrooms to well-educated people from other careers and giving them a fast-track route to becoming qualified teachers?

**Background:** A component of the No Child Left Behind Act encourages states to offer other methods of qualification that allow talented individuals to teach subjects they know even if they did not attend a college of education and do not possess traditional teaching credentials. This is called alternative certification.

- 9** Do you agree with the position of many teacher unions and others in the education bureaucracy that the public school system is healthy as it is? Have you accepted or received support and/or endorsements from any of these groups or like organizations?

**Background:** Groups and their affiliates such as the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the PTA and school board associations are known to actively oppose school choice programs, many charter school initiatives, and resist many teacher quality programs that allow non-traditional routes to the classroom. Endorsements from these organizations likely mean that a candidate shares their philosophy.

- 10** 10) If you could dictate one area where you would spend Bill Gates' money for education, what would it be?



HERE'S A SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATES IN YOUR COMMUNITY...  
PLEASE SEE THE QUESTIONS INSIDE.

Dear (Candidate):

As a concerned and active part of our community, the organization I represent is vitally interested in the state of our schools and the education of our children. Your candidacy means you may play a critical role in the direction our schools will take over the next few years. Indeed, if elected, your leadership will help craft the policies that forge a brighter future for all our children.

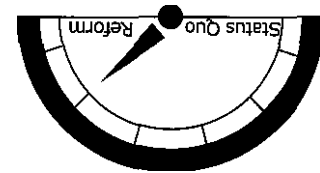
Public opinion polls consistently rank education as a top issue among voters, while concerns about low student achievement and deteriorating schools at the local, state and national levels have strengthened the cry for reevaluation and reform. As constituents at the forefront of these efforts, we would like to know your positions on various education issues that have been, or likely will

soon be, at the focal point of discussions on improving our schools.

We respectfully request that you complete the enclosed questionnaire on issues of interest to the parents, educators and concerned citizens of our community. Your response will be widely distributed to our members, as part of our voter education effort. A stamped reply envelope has been enclosed for your convenience.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or need additional information. Thank you for your time and interest in our schools and in the education of our children.

Sincerely,  
Your Name  
Your Organization



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CANDIDATE  
EDUCATION  
METER

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