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Conservatives React to Romney's Education Ideas

Mitt Romney's education plan, *A Chance for Every Child*, has drawn a mixed reaction from both ends of the political spectrum. Though the plan emphasizes school choice, parental rights, increased transparency of school results, and rightly chastises education unions for slowing down reform, it also features more of the federal meddling that marked former President Bush's failed education policies.

For example, Romney would make federal Title I and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) funds portable for low-income children and children with disabilities. As Romney said: "To receive the full complement of federal education dollars, states *must* provide students with ample school choice. In addition, digital learning options *must not* be prohibited. And charter schools or similar education choices *must* be scaled up to meet student demand." (Emphasis added.)

Unfortunately, this policy would further increase federal involvement in education and take decision making power away from state and local governments. The Heritage Foundation's Lindsey Burke wrote of this,

Yes, school choice, digital learning, and charters are imperative to improving America's education system. But the federal government should not be dictating what states *must* do in terms of education policy. Let's not fall into the trap of becoming conservative technocrats — placing mandates on states to implement certain policies with which we agree. That's the mistake some conservatives made with No Child Left Behind.

Romney's views on education were more conservative when he was a U.S. Senate candidate in 1994 — back then he wanted to abolish the entire Department of Education. Now he wants to expand federal involvement in order to combat what he terms "one of the foremost civil rights challenges of our time: the achievement gap facing many minority groups."

"No Child Left Behind helped our nation take a giant step forward in bridging [the] education gap," he said when he unveiled *A Chance for Every Child* at the Latino Coalition's Annual Economic Summit in Washington, D.C. last May. "As president, I will break the political logjam that has prevented successful reform of the law."

Romney promised, "I will reduce federal micromanagement while redoubling efforts to ensure that schools are held responsible for results." *A Chance for Every Child* states that a Romney administration would "Replace federally-mandated school interventions with a requirement that states create straightforward public report cards that evaluate each school on its contribution to student learning."

Mrs. Burke commented, "Reforming NCLB is not the answer. . . . Nearly a half century after the Johnson-era law was first implemented (NCLB is the eighth reauthorization of 1965's Elementary and Secondary Education Act), it has failed to improve academic outcomes and has left states with nothing more than reams of red tape."

Instead of reworking failed legislation, Mrs. Burke argues, Romney should



move forward with policies that conservatives have already drafted such as the APLUS Act: "APLUS would allow states to opt out and spend their share of fed-

eral education dollars on any lawful education purpose they believe would best benefit students. It's one of the best ways

(See Romney's Plan, page 4)

Louisiana Voucher Program Privatizes Education

Louisiana's voucher program is now the most comprehensive in the country, thanks to a new law that will allow more low and middle-income students in substandard public schools to use public funds to attend private schools.

Beginning this fall, students whose parents make less than \$60,000, and who attend a public school where at least 25% of students test below grade level, will be eligible to take up to \$8,800 annually to the charter school of their choice. Louisiana currently has 120 of these schools, and that number is expected to rise as demand for vouchers increases. At least 6,000 students have already applied for the 5,000 available spots. 380,000 students are eligible for vouchers — more than half the state's total student population.

"We have a moral imperative to improve the education system for our children, our state, and our country, and these new laws will be a game changer for Louisiana," said Governor Bobby Jindal. "Over the last four years, we've made incredible progress by revamping ethics law, cutting taxes, and growing Louisiana's economy even during a national recession — but the single most important thing we can do to ensure the continued prosperity of our state and our people is to make sure that every child gets a great education."

HB 976, which was signed into law in April, makes it easier to form charter schools by streamlining the application process and creating three new charter pathways. It also gives parents more tools by allowing schools to become eligible for Recovery School District assistance af-

ter three years of failing if a majority of parents petition for it.

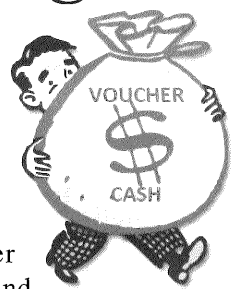
The voucher program will expand further next year, when students of all income levels will be able to use mini-vouchers worth up to \$1,300 per student per class to pay private-sector vendors for classes not offered in the public schools. This voucher money, which is subtracted from public school funding, can be used to pay tutors, online schools, businesses, industry trade groups, and other educational providers. State officials must review each of these private sector classes to ensure that vouchers are being used responsibly.

"It's hard to overestimate the substance of these policies which will have a major impact on public education and benefit countless Louisiana school children for years to come," said Council for A Better Louisiana President Barry Erwin.

It's estimated that the newly expanded voucher program may remove as much as \$3.3 billion annually from public schools — a fact that has public school officials worried. *Reuters* reported,

The state has not done a formal fiscal analysis, but public school advocates say subtracting the costs of vouchers from their budgets is unfair because they have the same fixed costs — from utilities to custodial services — whether a child is in the building four hours a day or

(See Voucher Program, page 4)



Scott Walker's Victory Means Better Education Funding

While Wisconsin Democrats were busy trying to recall Governor Scott Walker earlier this year, Walker was working to reform and improve the state's education system. The Democrats failed in their recall attempt, but Walker's reforms have already succeeded. There is still work to do — Wisconsin has, for example, committed to implementing the Obama administration's problematic Common Core State Standards — but there is also room for Walker's successful reforms to serve as a model for other states.

Walker's fight with union officials turned into a literal stake out last year, when hundreds of protestors camped on

the statehouse floor, but that didn't keep him from making some positive changes to Wisconsin education funding. Walker has limited collective bargaining, let



Governor Scott Walker

schools bid competitively on health insurance, asked school employees to contribute to health and pension plans, and introduced merit pay for teachers. These changes will save districts hundreds of millions of

dollars; competitive health insurance bids already save schools \$220 per student per year, and the Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates that the change to pension plans will save school \$600 million over just two years.

The Wall Street Journal's Kimberly (See Better Education Funding, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Gerald Molen won an Oscar for co-producing *Schindler's List*, but was banned from a U.S. government class in Ronan, Montana for being too conservative. Molen announced in a letter to the *Daily Inter Lake* that Ronan High School Principal Tom Stack told him his conservative political views might harm students. Mr. Molen said the presentation he had planned for the high school seniors who had invited him to speak "had nothing political or capricious that would be harmful to a senior high school student (or even a grammar school student) or a teacher."

6-year-old Gannon Farley's handwritten note, complete with poor spelling, fooled school administrators into letting him out of an after-school program. A secretary at Burkland Elementary school in Middleborough, Massachusetts released Gannon from school when he gave her a note written in marker that read, "Dery Mrs. Trottyty, Gannon is not going to the prrogram." Gannon's mother, Amie Nay, says the school did not contact her, but sent Gannon to their empty home on a school bus. Nay says she's furious that school administrators were duped by the first-grader's prank.

Students at Roosevelt High School in Los Angeles are encouraged to tell their friends about the first ever on-campus Planned Parenthood clinic. Students have access to birth control, sexually transmitted disease testing, and counseling at no cost without parental consent. The clinic is funded by Family PACT, a public family-planning program that targets low income families.

A California high school principal is defending his decision to allow a valedictorian to deliver his graduation speech in Spanish, though most of the audience spoke English. Jessie Ceja, the principal at Orestimba High School in Newman, California, told *Mattos Newspapers* that valedictorian Saul Tello, Jr. had earned the right to give his speech in any way he wanted.

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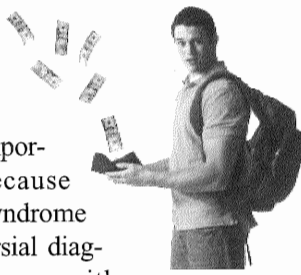
Former Law Student Enlarges Student Loan Loophole

A Maryland woman who successfully petitioned to have nearly \$340,000 in student loans wiped out in her bankruptcy proceedings may have helped set an important precedent for the way future student loan debts are handled in bankruptcy. That's bad news for the taxpayers who would foot the bill if more education loans are forgiven in the same way former law student Carol Todd's were.

Carol Todd of Nottingham, Maryland spent time in law school, was awarded degrees from four accredited institutions, and earned a Ph.D. from an unaccredited online school over a span of about twenty years. Even so, U.S. Bankruptcy court Judge Robert Gordon ruled that her Asperger's Syndrome rendered her unable to get a job or support herself. Gordon ruled in Todd's favor when she petitioned to have her student loan debt forgiven in a Chapter 7 bankruptcy, writing that "it must be possible for some combination of factors to exist to justify the discharge of student loan debt" and declared that she qualified for an exemption under the "undue hardship" requirements that federal law applies to student loan debt, criminal fines,

and unpaid child support.

This is important both because Asperger's Syndrome is a controversial diagnosis — some with Asperger's do have a debilitating condition while others are merely socially awkward — and because it may strengthen the case of those who wish to weaken standing education debt practices. In 1976, Congress changed the bankruptcy code to crack down on students who tried to get rid of student debt by declaring bankruptcy days after graduation. Further changes in 1984 made it even more difficult to obtain loan forgiveness, and a 2005 amendment to the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act further solidified the difficulty. *Time Magazine* reported that the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys is lobbying Congress to pass legislation that would make it easier for borrowers to rid themselves of education debt. Their attempts have been unsuccessful so far, but Carol Todd's case may go a long way toward aiding their cause.



MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



Colorado School Courts Illegal Immigrants with Tuition Break

Illegal immigrants in Colorado got a big break when Metropolitan State College of Denver trustees voted to drop tuition rates 58% for non-citizens. The college hopes this controversial move will attract more Hispanic students, and more federal funds.

The rate is "for students living in the state of Colorado who through no fault of their own do not have the lawful status to be eligible for resident tuition rates," the college said in a statement.

"We're doing exactly what we've been given the authority to do by the legislature — to be flexible enough to generate revenue streams that work for us," Stephen Jordan, president of Metro State, told *The Denver Post*. Jordan expects about 300 students to qualify for the reduced rates next fall, and school officials estimate those students will result in about \$884,000 in revenue in the fall, and \$2 million over the next five years, *The Denver Post* reported.

If Metro State can attract more Latino students, it has a chance at being

ranked as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). This classification would more than double the amount of federal funds the school receives. Colorado already has two four-year HSI's, and three community college HSI's. The U.S. Department of Education awarded more than \$103 million to HSI schools last year, and Colorado legis-

lators say they hope they can help add to that number by encouraging other schools to apply.

Trustee Jack Pogge was the only member of the board to vote against the plan, which passed 7-1. He told *The Denver Post* he was concerned the rate change wouldn't benefit the school enough, particularly in light of the fact that the Colorado state legislature has voted against similar ploys five times. "It's not our position to do this," he said. State Senator Pat Steadman (D-Denver) assured supporters he had "no intention of seeing anyone retaliate" in the legislature. "Is Metro going around the actions of the legislature? Probably. But it's something we enabled

(See *Tuition Break*, page 3)

Book of the Month



Obama's Education Takeover, Lance T. Izumi, Encounter Books, 2012, \$5.99.

Most Americans don't know it, but the Obama administration has worked hard to get control over your child's education. It has done so illegally, at taxpayer expense, and in ways that most people — including lawmakers — are unaware of.

Izumi's newest volume is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to understand the administration's Common Core State Standards (CCSS). CCSS have wrenched education decision-making power away from parents and granted it to federal officials. Izumi, who is senior director of education studies at the Pacific Research Institute, outlines the problems with CCSS in *Obama's Education Takeover*.

Izumi explains that the CCSS, which were part of the Race to the Top (RTTT) portion of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, will mean the illegal and expensive implementation of a national curriculum. He explains the various illegalities simply but thoroughly in a brief and easy-to-read volume that will prove useful to those who want to restore local control over education.

All but a few states have already agreed to use the new CCSS, even when this means lowering their existing academic standards. They have done so for a chance to get federal grant money, not realizing that the cost to implement CCSS will far outweigh any possible grant dollars. California and Massachusetts, writes Izumi, agreed to lower their existing language and literature standards in order to take on CCSS and qualify for RTTT money. Though California will not receive any of these funds, it still must spend hundreds of millions of dollars to implement CCSS.

When one Eagle Forum member asked how the state of Wisconsin will pay for CCSS implementation, Donald F. Smith III, budget and policy analyst at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, said,

... there are several states that received federal Race to the Top dollars that are developing resources specific to the CCSS. Our understanding is that these resources will be "open source," i.e., available for free to any school district, charter school, or private school that wants to utilize them.

Wisconsin officials mistakenly think CCSS will cost nothing. If Mr. Smith had read Mr. Izumi's research, he would have known that the California Department of Education estimates it will cost \$759 million to implement CCSS in California. It may be too late for states to back out of CCSS, but it's not too late to let lawmakers know how harmful the new standards will be.

OBAMA'S EDUCATION TAKEOVER
LANCE T. IZUMI
ENCOUNTER BOOKS

What's Missing from the Romney Plan?

- **Department of Education:** The plan does not call for closing the U.S. Department of Education, a longtime conservative goal that Romney himself endorsed in 1994. Abolishing the U.S. Department of Education was a plank in the National Republican Platform during the Reagan years.
- **Federal Funding:** The plan does not call for cutting or even slowing the growth of federal spending on education, which doubled under George W. Bush and doubled again under Barack Obama, although the plan admits that “increased spending on our K-12 public schools has failed to produce results.”
- **Waivers:** The plan does not mention the illegal waivers that the Obama administration has granted to 26 states, excusing them from their contractual obligation to insure that all children are at grade level by 2014.
- **Local Control:** The plan does not indicate how local control of public education can be squared with Romney's support for the Common Core State Standards.
- **Reading:** There is nothing in the Romney plan about the most basic purpose of elementary education: teaching children to read. Children should be reading by the end of the first grade, not promoted to higher grades when they can't read at grade level.
- **American History:** There is nothing in the plan to support the truthful teaching of what is good about American history and culture, so kids can be proud of our country.
- **English Language:** Although Romney unveiled his education plan to a group called the Latino Coalition, he failed to mention that so-called bilingual education harms Latinos and other immigrant children by not requiring them to speak English. Has Romney forgotten that his only electoral victory, as governor of Massachusetts, was attributed to his support for an anti-bilingual, pro-English initiative on the same ballot? The pro-English initiative received an overwhelming 68% of the vote in 2002, while Romney scraped to victory with just 49.8 percent.
- **College loans:** There is nothing in the Romney plan for dealing with the financial bubble of rising college tuition financed by \$1 trillion of federal student loan debt. Although more than half of recent college graduates could not get jobs in the fields they studied, the plan nevertheless endorses the absurd statistic that 62% of all U.S. jobs require postsecondary education, rising to an even more ridiculous 75% by 2020.

Romney's Plan *(Continued from page 1)*

Congress could restore constitutional governance in education: send dollars and decision-making back to state and local leaders who are closest to the student.”

Romney's ambiguous positions on education reform are disappointing to conservatives, just as his apparent emphasis on school choice is disappointing to the liberals in the Obama administration who have relied on Romney-approved policies. As ABC News writer Matt Negrin commented in a May 24 article, “education is the one area where Romney and Obama could learn to work together.”

William H. Guenther, president of MassInsight, a nonpartisan research organization that advised Romney on K-12 issues during his time as governor, told *Education Week* that Romney is among “liberal and conservative education reformers” focused on a combination of “excellent goals and no excuses.” “Governor Romney's education reform packages were ahead of their time,” he said. “Putting aside the lightning-rod issue of school choice, there's a lot of common ground between the candidates.”

For conservatives there's too much “common ground” between Romney and the Obama administration. For example, Romney is in favor of the problematic Common Core State Standards (CCSS), though he says he doesn't approve of the way states were encouraged to adopt them. Oren Cass, Romney's domestic policy director, said those policies “effectively are an attempt to manipulating states into” Common Core, *Education Week* reported. This mixed review is small comfort to conservatives who oppose CCSS on the grounds that the standards are intrusive, poorly written, and blatantly unconstitutional. The Common Core should be abolished, not reformed, and Romney has passed up an opportunity to help make that happen.

CCSS are an important part of the federal Race to the Top (RTTT) program; states that agreed to implement CCSS were given preferred status when applying for RTTT grant money. But rather than arguing against RTTT's expansion of federal education funding, Romney merely says the program was poorly designed and needs improvement:

It awarded states money in return for promises, without regard for results. States merely had to offer ambitious plans for change to win funding, and now many of them are struggling to follow through. They have asked to amend their plans and extend their implementation deadlines, but the Department of Education has already sent the money out the door and now can only hope that change occurs.

Romney has also echoed President Obama's policies by proposing the block-granting of teacher quality money. President Obama has made similar proposals in his budget requests, seeking to combine funding for federal teacher improvement programs.

Veterans of the Bush administration have questioned whether Romney's reforms are adequate. Sandy Kress, the former Bush White House aide who

worked with Ted Kennedy to craft No Child Left Behind, told *Education Week* he supports Romney's presidential bid despite reservations about his education plan:

What would the expectations be for states and districts? What would the expectations be for the money in terms of the report cards and for the responsibility for learning? What will the expectations be for the rigor of the standards and the consequences? That's unclear.

But Margaret Spellings, who also worked in the Bush White House and later became Secretary of Education, resigned in protest from Romney's education advisory team because, she said, “I believe in a muscular federal role on school accountability.”

Liberal Huffington Post blogger

Christopher Emdin argued in a June 4 posting that Romney's plan was too similar to existing failed policies. “Romney's ‘A Chance for Every Child’ is no different than Bush's ‘No Child Left Behind,’” he wrote. “Both phrases tug at the heartstrings of the public, but the initiatives themselves are poorly constructed, laden with misconceptions about the nature of teaching and learning.”

Now there's something on which both liberals and conservatives can agree!



Voucher Program *(Continued from page 1)*

six. [Louisiana Superintendent of Public Education John] White responds that the state is not in the business of funding buildings; it's funding education.

Vouchers can be used to pay for tuition at religious schools, and teachers

unions want to put a stop to that. Most of Louisiana's 120 charters are religious schools. The Louisiana Federation of Teachers, the Louisiana Association of Educators, the Louisiana School Boards Association, and 34



other public school boards claim the bill violates the state's constitution and “put[s] public school systems in more peril than ever.” They are suing the state of Louisiana and the Board of Secondary and Elementary Education in an attempt to reverse the reforms. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that vouchers can be used for religious education provided the state does not promote any one faith — parents

must choose where to send their children.

Other public school advocates are concerned because most charter schools are not closely monitored by state officials. Starting next year, students attending schools with voucher money will be required to take state standardized tests

to measure progress.

It's unclear what consequences will come into play for charter schools whose students have low test scores.

Vouchers have worked well in Louisiana in previous years. The state has one of the lowest high school graduation

rates in the country, but Governor Jindal says that rate is improving. The 2011 rate was 3.7% higher than 2010, and graduation rates have improved 11.6% since 2002 — outpacing the national average. “To me,” said Superintendent White, “it's a moral outrage that the government would say, ‘We know what's best for your child.’ Who are we to tell parents we know better?”

Better Education Funding *(Continued from page 1)*

Strassel argued in a June 7 article that Walker's reforms are unique because they succeeded in broadening the debate over education reform:

The Walker breakthrough was to integrate education into the broader fiscal and structural dispute. His argument: Wisconsin is broke. We can continue to pour money into the public-union monopoly, forcing us to cut further from priorities (namely, education). Or we can enact broad structural changes, the saving from which we can use to better our state (notably, schools) . . . Mr. Walker's budget victory has shown that structural government reform is the surest way to put more dollars into kids.

Walker is not the first governor to use broad fiscal reforms to improve state education, but his recall victory makes his efforts doubly important. Senator Mitch McConnell told *National Review*, [Wisconsin] was the second biggest election in America this year. It sent an extraordinary message to elected officials: that you can tackle the single biggest problem confronting our country, which is the massive unfunded liabilities coming our way. At the federal level, it's entitlements, but you see the same thing at the state and local levels. There were promises made by today's politicians to today's union leaders that cannot possibly be met, so what happened in Wisconsin was incredibly consequential.