



# A Chance for Every Child

Mitt Romney's Plan for Restoring the  
Promise of American Education

May 23, 2012

**Foreword by**  
Governor Jeb Bush

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### **FOREWORD by Governor Jeb Bush**

There is no more critical issue facing the United States than the need for education reform. Despite spending more on public education than virtually every other nation, our students' math and science achievement lags well behind that of their peers abroad. One in four American students fails to graduate from high school within four years of entering, and far too many of those who do graduate are ill-prepared for the demands of college and careers. Once the world's leader in the postsecondary degree completion, we now rank in the middle of the pack among industrialized countries. Many American students suffer due to inadequate schooling, but the shortcomings of the American education system are most devastating for minorities and the poor. Our ability to meet these challenges will determine not only the success of our economy, but our very future as a democracy.

There is no one "silver bullet" solution to our nation's educational problems, but recent experience clearly indicates what needs to be done. We must provide families with abundant school choice, among both traditional public schools and charter and online alternatives. We must set high standards for student achievement, regularly assess students' progress toward meeting those standards, and be honest in reporting the results. Schools must be accountable for their contribution to student learning through policies that distinguish between abject failure, mediocrity, and success. And we must overhaul the teaching profession to make it attractive to our best college graduates,

basing evaluation and compensation decisions not on paper credentials but rather on classroom effectiveness. During my tenure as governor of Florida, we embraced each of these strategies and saw dramatic improvements in outcomes, especially for our most disadvantaged students.

What we do not need are prescriptive top-down mandates emanating from Washington D.C., which are so fashionable among many in the nation's capital. The federal government cannot continue to spend borrowed money to prop up a failed status quo, as it has over the past four years under President Obama's leadership. America's federal system of government allows for a more dynamic approach to reform, with states serving as laboratories of democracy in competition with one another to provide the best education possible to their citizens. The federal government must ensure that states embrace the basic principles of expanded school choice, high standards, and effective teaching while at the same time empowering them to carve their own paths toward excellence for all students.

Mitt Romney knows what it will take to restore the promise of America's education system and, in so doing, ensure the nation's long-term economic success. During his time as governor of Massachusetts, the state's students became the first to lead the nation in both reading and math in both fourth and eighth grade. He also promoted greater school choice and increased access to higher education. Governor Romney understands that leadership is required to create real change for students, and his time as governor is proof that he is willing and able to make tough decisions and put our kids first. The agenda set forth in this white paper focuses on increasing choice and transparency for parents, addresses the rising cost of college and the growing amount of student loans, and presents a broader vision to ensure our country's future prosperity. Governor Romney's plan gives all students the opportunity to succeed. I am confident that he is the right person to lead our country and put us back on a path to prosperity.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As president, Mitt Romney will pursue genuine education reform that puts the interests of parents and students ahead of special interests and provides a chance for every child. He will take the unprecedented step of tying federal funds directly to dramatic reforms that expand parental choice, invest in innovation, and reward teachers for their results instead of their tenure. These policies will equip state leaders to achieve the change that can only come from commitment and action at the local level. He will also ensure that students have diverse and affordable options for higher education to give them the skills they need to succeed after graduation and that, when they graduate, they can find jobs that provide a rewarding return on their educational investment.

### **K-12: Promoting Choice And Innovation**

Giving students trapped in bad schools a genuine alternative requires four things: (1) such alternatives must exist, (2) parents must receive clear information about the performance of their current school and of the alternatives, (3) students must be allowed to move to a new school, and (4) students must bring funding with them so that new schools can afford to serve them. Romney's reforms achieve each of these objectives:

- **Allow Low Income And Special Needs Students To Choose Which School To Attend.** Make Title I and IDEA funds portable so that eligible students can choose which school to attend and bring funding with them. This plan will allow the student to choose from any district or public charter school, or a private school where permitted by state law, or to use funds toward a tutoring provider or digital course.
- **Provide Incentives For States To Increase Choices For Parents And Develop Quality Alternatives.** Require states to adopt open-enrollment policies for students receiving Title I and IDEA funds, and to eliminate caps on charter and digital schools.
- **Build On The Success Of Effective Charter And Digital Schools.** Amend the federal Charter School Program so that successful school management organizations can receive funding to replicate their efforts, serve more students, and take their programs to scale.
- **Expand The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program To Serve As A Model For The Nation.** Reverse President Obama's efforts to eliminate this popular and effective program. Increase funding and raise caps on participation to allow more families to benefit.

### **K-12: Ensuring High Standards And Responsibility For Results**

Currently, there is little easily-available data for parents about their children's schools. Providing better information for parents will empower them to hold districts and states responsible for results and, when combined with increased parental choice, give them more control over their children's education. Romney's reforms will improve transparency and give parents the information they need:

- **Reform No Child Left Behind By Emphasizing Transparency And Responsibility For Results.** 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.

## **K-12: Recruiting And Rewarding Great Teachers**

A school is only as strong as its teachers, but the most promising teachers often find it difficult to reach the classroom door or receive recognition for their efforts once inside. Romney's reforms smooth the path for talented individuals to join the profession and shape the next generation.

- **Attract And Reward Great Teachers Through Increased Flexibility And Block Grants.** Consolidate the numerous and overlapping federal teacher quality programs. Offer states flexible block grants if they adopt policies to advance and reward teacher quality, such as eliminating or reforming teacher tenure and establishing evaluation systems that focus on effectiveness in advancing student achievement.
- **Eliminate Unnecessary Certification Requirements That Discourage New Teachers.** For instance, the federal "highly qualified teacher" requirement, while well-intentioned, only serves to reinforce hurdles that prevent talented individuals from entering the teaching profession in the first place.

## **Higher Ed: A New Vision Of Affordable And Applicable Learning**

America's traditional community and four-year colleges are the heart of our nation's higher education system. However, a flood of federal dollars is driving up tuition and burdening too many young Americans with substantial debt and too few opportunities. Meanwhile, other models of advanced skills training are becoming ever more important to success in the American economy, and new educational institutions will be required to fill those roles. Romney's reforms spur the access, affordability, innovation, and transparency needed to address all of these challenges:

- **Strengthen And Simplify The Financial Aid System.** Consolidate duplicative and overly complex programs within the Department of Education. Focus the Department on giving students and families with financial need the appropriate information about completion and persistence, loan repayment rates, future earnings, and other indicators to intelligently weigh the risks and benefits of the many options available to them, rather than limiting choices through punitive regulations.
- **Welcome Private Sector Participation Instead Of Pushing It Away.** Reverse President Obama's nationalization of the student loan market and welcome private sector participation in providing information, financing, and the education itself.
- **Replace Burdensome Regulation With Innovation And Competition.** Encourage market entry by innovative new education models, emphasize skill attainment instead of time spent in the classroom, and support research and development. Repeal confusing and unnecessary regulations that primarily serve to drive costs higher, and replace them with common-sense reforms that ensure appropriate student outcomes.

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## **PART I: THE IMPERATIVE OF EDUCATION REFORM**

Education has always been central to the American Dream. Families immigrated to the United States to secure a better education and a better life for their children. Parents saved from even the most modest paychecks to help their children pay for college. Students graduated from both high school and college confident that with their hard work would come valuable skills, with those skills a good-paying job, and with that job the promise of prosperity and an even better future for the next generation. Education guaranteed freedom — both the economic freedom of self-sufficiency and the individual liberties that only a democracy of well-informed citizens can protect.

The connection between education and prosperity could not be clearer. We know, for instance, that receiving a high school diploma is one of the most potent antidotes to poverty. Only 2 percent of those who graduate from high school, get a full-time job, and wait until age 21 and get married before having children end up in poverty. By comparison, that figure is 76 percent for those who fail to do all three.<sup>1</sup> We know that improvements in education lead to improvements in productivity, which are in turn the key to increases in wages and our standard of living.<sup>2</sup> We even know that education improves health and happiness, reduces unemployment, and strengthens the fabric of our society.<sup>3</sup> With access to quality education comes broader opportunity and greater equality.<sup>4</sup>

Sadly, today that American Dream too often represents only a dream. In many corners of the nation, children have no access to an effective school that can give them the opportunity they deserve. Across the nation, our school system is a world leader in spending yet lags on virtually every

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Haskins, "Mobility Is A Problem; Now What?" [Brookings](#), 12/23/11.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Bernanke, Remarks At The U.S. Chamber Of Commerce Education And Workforce Summit, Washington, D.C., [Board Of Governors Of The Federal Reserve System](#), 9/24/07.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Bernanke, Remarks At The U.S. Chamber Of Commerce Education And Workforce Summit, Washington, D.C., [Board Of Governors Of The Federal Reserve System](#), 9/24/07.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Bernanke, Remarks At The Greater Omaha Chamber Of Commerce, Omaha, NE, [Board Of Governors Of The Federal Reserve System](#), 2/6/07.

measure of results. Higher education is becoming at once more important and more unaffordable than ever, stretching family finances and producing new graduates who have too much debt and not enough of the skills they need to succeed in the modern economy.

Each in its own way, these challenges compound the immediate fiscal and economic crises facing the nation. In the long term, they pose serious threats to the equality of opportunity in our society, and to our competitiveness in the 21st century global economy. To restore America's promise, and get Americans working again, we must achieve meaningful reform in our education system.

### **The Imperative of K-12 Education Reform: Countless Reforms But Few Results**

The challenges we face are not new. Since *A Nation at Risk* was published almost thirty years ago, our country has understood the urgent need for reform. Yet today, fewer than 75 percent of freshmen graduate within four years of entering high school,<sup>5</sup> and far too many who do graduate require remediation when they enroll in college.<sup>6</sup> In a recent survey of more than 10,000 of its graduates, the Harvard Business School identified America's K-12 education system as one of our nation's greatest competitive weaknesses — only the dysfunction of our political system itself scored worse.<sup>7</sup> On the latest international PISA test, American high school students ranked 14th out of 34 developed countries in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in math.<sup>8</sup> China's Shanghai province led

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<sup>5</sup> "The Condition Of Education 2011: Public High School Graduation Rates," [National Center For Education Statistics](#), May 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Press Release, "United States Loses \$5.6 Billion Providing College Remediation, According To New Brief From Alliance For Excellent Education," [Alliance For Excellent Education](#), 5/5/11.

<sup>7</sup> Michael E. Porter & Jan W. Rivkin, "Prosperity At Risk: Findings Of Harvard Business School's Survey On U.S. Competitiveness," [Harvard Business School](#), January 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Howard L. Fleischman, Paul J. Hopstock, Maris P. Pelczar, & Brooke E. Shelly, "Highlights From PISA 2009: Performance Of U.S. 15 Year-Old Students In Reading, Mathematics, And Science Literacy In An International Context," [National Center For Education Statistics](#), December 2010.

the world in all three subjects, outperforming the United States by multiple grade levels in each.<sup>9</sup> These results are unacceptable in their own right, and a sobering warning of a potential decline threatening our nation's future.

Our K-12 system also poses one of the foremost civil rights challenges of our time: the achievement gap facing many minority groups. The average African American or Hispanic student performs at the same level in 12th grade that the average white student achieves in 8th grade.<sup>10</sup> More than one in three African American and Hispanic students fails to graduate from high school within four years of entering.<sup>11</sup> This unconscionable reality flows as a direct consequence from the poor quality of the schools that serve disproportionately minority communities in low-income areas. For example, African American and Hispanic children make up only 38 percent of the nation's students overall, but 69 percent of the students in schools identified by states as the lowest performing.<sup>12</sup> The tragic result is that instead of providing an escape from the cycle of poverty, our education system is reinforcing it.

Politicians have attempted to solve these problems with more spending. But while America's spending per student is among the highest in the world,<sup>13</sup> our results lag far behind.<sup>14</sup> We spend nearly two-and-a-half times as much per pupil today, in real terms, as in 1970, but high school

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<sup>9</sup> Martin West, "Education and Global Competitiveness: Lessons for the U.S. from International Evidence," [American Enterprise Institute](#), 9/29/11.

<sup>10</sup> "Table A-11-1. Average reading scale scores and selected achievement gaps of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students, by sex and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1992-2009," *The Condition Of Education: Academic Outcomes*, [National Center For Education Statistics](#), May 2011.

<sup>11</sup> "A Close Look At The Dropout Crisis: Examining Black And Latino Males In New York City," Metropolitan Center For Urban Education, [NYU Steinhardt School Of Culture, Education, And Human Development](#), August 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Hurlburt, Kerstin Carlson, Le Floch, Susan Bowles Therriault, & Susan Cole, "Baseline Analyses Of SIG Applications and SIG-Eligible And SIG-Awarded Schools," [National Center For Education Evaluation And Regional Assistance](#), May 2011.

<sup>13</sup> "Chart PF1.2.B: Public Expenditure On Primary, Secondary And Tertiary Education, Per Student, 20071 Expenditure Per Student In US\$ (PPP converted)," PF1.2: Public Spending On Education, OECD Family Database, OECD, 6/14/11.

<sup>14</sup> Howard L. Fleischman, Paul J. Hopstock, Maris P. Pelczar, & Brooke E. Shelly, "Highlights From PISA 2009: Performance Of U.S. 15 Year-Old Students In Reading, Mathematics, And Science Literacy In An International Context," [National Center For Education Statistics](#), December 2010.

achievement and graduation rates have stagnated.<sup>15</sup> Higher spending rarely correlates with better results. Even the liberal Center for American Progress acknowledged in a recent study that “the literature strongly calls into question the notion that simply investing more money in schools will result in better outcomes,” and reported from its own research that most states showed “no clear relationship between spending and achievement” even after adjusting for other factors like the cost of living.<sup>16</sup>

Tinkering around the edges and using money to fix the problem has proven fruitless. The recent infusion of stimulus funds has only served to delay the difficult budgetary decisions facing states, which now stand at the edge of a fiscal cliff. Providing more funding for the status quo will not deliver the results that our students deserve, our country needs, and our taxpayers expect. More than ever before, fiscal responsibility and resourcefulness are required to refocus investments and deliver results.

Unfortunately, rather than embracing reform and innovation, America remains gridlocked in an antiquated system controlled to a disturbing degree by the unions representing teachers. The teachers unions spend millions of dollars to influence the debate in favor of the entrenched interests of adults, not the students our system should serve. The efforts of teachers will be central to any successful reform, but their unions have a very different agenda: opposing innovation that might disrupt the status quo while insulating even the least effective teachers from accountability. Sadly, these priorities do not correlate with better outcomes for our children. To the contrary, teachers unions are consistently on the front lines fighting against initiatives to attract and retain the best teachers, measure performance, provide accountability, or offer choices to parents.

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew J. Coulson, "President To Call For Big New Ed. Spending – Here's A Look At How Well That's Worked In The Past," [CATO](#), 1/27/10.

<sup>16</sup> Ulrich Boser, "Return On Educational Investment," [Center For American Progress](#), January 2011.

In defense of the failed system, unions spend hundreds of millions of dollars to curry the favor of political leaders. This money is taken from teachers as a condition of their employment, with many teachers forced to pay almost \$1,000 in union dues each year.<sup>17</sup> During the last presidential election the National Education Association (NEA) spent more on federal, state, and local elections than any other organization in the country,<sup>18</sup> with more than 90 percent of those funds going to support Democrats.<sup>19</sup> It is no wonder that America's K-12 system is stagnant, when the very individuals charged with ensuring children's success are forced to fund efforts to stifle reform, while parents and children have no one to speak on their behalf. Real change will come only when the special interests take a back seat to the interests of students.

Across the nation, glimmers of success offer reason for hope. Charter school networks such as the KIPP Academies, Uncommon Schools, and Aspire Public Schools are producing remarkable results with students in some of our nation's most disadvantaged communities. Florida Virtual School and other digital education providers are using technology in new ways to personalize instruction to meet students' needs. In Massachusetts, whose schools have led the nation since Romney's time as governor, students' math achievement is comparable to that of the top-performing national school systems worldwide.<sup>20</sup> In our nation's capital, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has achieved high school graduation rates above 90 percent in inner-city communities where barely half of public school students are earning their diplomas.<sup>21</sup> These successes point the way toward genuine reform. They also underscore the broader struggles and show how far we have to go.

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<sup>17</sup> John Fund, "What's At Stake In Wisconsin's Budget Battle," [Wall Street Journal](#), 2/19/11.

<sup>18</sup> "Top National Donors Based on Combined State and Federal Contributions, 2007-2008," [Center For Responsive Politics](#), Accessed 5/22/12.

<sup>19</sup> "National Education Assn: Totals," [Center For Responsive Politics](#), Accessed 5/22/12.

<sup>20</sup> "Why Massachusetts Students, The Best In The U.S., Lag Behind Best-In-The-World Students of Hong Kong," [American Institutes For Research](#), 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Lindsey Burke, "Obama's Budget Ends Funding for D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program," The Foundry Blog, [Heritage Foundation](#), 2/13/12.

## **The Imperative of Higher Education Reform: More Debt, Fewer Jobs**

America's colleges and universities are an extraordinary asset for our nation, and the envy of the world. In the same survey that found our nation's K-12 education system to be one of our economy's greatest competitive weaknesses, our higher education system was identified as our greatest strength.<sup>22</sup> Our universities can claim a substantial amount of credit for the fact that we have more Nobel laureates than any other country and that we lead the world in innovation, in fields from communications to medicine.

Unfortunately, our system is quietly slipping into a crisis brought on by inattention to costs and lack of discipline around federal programs and spending, and exacerbated by the growing competition from other countries determined to prepare their students for success in a global economy. While our institutions may be leaders in many disciplines, students are not accessing postsecondary education at the rate they should, and those who do find themselves confronted with significant challenges, including the rapidly-rising cost of higher education. At the other end of the process, too many students who pursue higher education fail to successfully complete their degrees, and even those who do finish often find themselves with skills mismatched to today's job market.

Increasingly, a postsecondary education is becoming a basic requirement for economic success. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 62 percent of all U.S. jobs now require postsecondary education; that number is expected to increase to 75 percent by 2020.<sup>23</sup> But the current emphasis on the standard four-year degree may be misplaced. For instance, the Department of Labor found that less than half of the fastest growing professions will require such a degree, while

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<sup>22</sup> Michael E. Porter & Jan W. Rivkin, "Prosperity At Risk: Findings Of Harvard Business School's Survey On U.S. Competitiveness," [Harvard Business School](#), January 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Joan Marshall, "Now's The Time To Save," [Baltimore Sun](#), 1/3/12.

two-year degrees, occupational certificates, and apprenticeships are likely to be the most appropriate preparation for a wide variety of fields.<sup>24</sup>

For years we have focused on increasing access to college — an important goal, to be sure. But somehow *success* in college has been lost in the shuffle of priorities. Despite spending more than twice as much per student as other developed countries, our degree attainment rate lags behind.<sup>25</sup> Currently, only 27 percent of community college students and 57 percent of those pursuing bachelor's degrees will finish within three or six years, respectively.<sup>26</sup> Completion rates are even lower for minority students.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, students and their families face skyrocketing prices for higher education and, partly as a result, ever heavier debt burdens. Since 1982, the cost of college has increased by 439 percent — dramatically higher than the growth even in the cost of health care.<sup>28</sup> These costs represent a growing burden on not just families, but taxpayers who foot the bill for a patchwork of federal financial aid programs. Nearly half of undergraduate students are now borrowing to pay for college,<sup>29</sup> and the average debt held when they graduate is over \$25,000.<sup>30</sup> Students took out more than \$100 billion in student loans last year, a record high, and total outstanding loans now exceed \$1 trillion — an amount that exceeds total credit card debt.<sup>31</sup> Even more concerning, some estimates suggest that one out of four borrowers is carrying a past-due student loan balance.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Economic News Release, "Table 7. The 30 Occupations With The Fastest Projected Employment Growth, 2010-20," [Bureau Of Labor Statistics](#), 2/1/12.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur M. Hauptman & Young Kim, "Cost, Commitment, And Attainment In Higher Education: An International Comparison," [Jobs For The Future: Education For Economic Opportunity](#), May 2009.

<sup>26</sup> "The Condition Of Education 2011: Postsecondary Graduation Rates," [National Center For Education Statistics](#), May 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer Gonzalez, "Reports Highlight Disparities In Graduation Rates Among White And Minority Students," [Chronicle Of Higher Education](#), 8/9/10.

<sup>28</sup> Penelope Wang, "Is College Still Worth The Price?" [CNN Money](#), 4/13/09.

<sup>29</sup> "Fast Facts: Financial Aid," [National Center For Education Statistics](#), Accessed 5/22/12.

<sup>30</sup> Tamar Lewin, "College Graduates' Debt Burden Grew, Yet Again, in 2010," [New York Times](#), 11/2/11.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis Cauchon, "Student Loans Outstanding Will Exceed \$1 Trillion This Year," [USA Today](#), 10/25/11.

<sup>32</sup> Meta Brown, Andrew Haughwout, Donghoon Lee, & Wilbert van der Klaauw, "Grading Student Loans," Liberty Street Economics, [Federal Reserve Bank Of New York](#), 3/5/12.

The federal government has attempted to step in with even more funding — for instance, during the period that the cost of tuition increased 439 percent, federal spending on Pell Grants increased 475 percent — yet this has only fed the growth in costs.<sup>33</sup> In just the last decade, federal funding for higher education has risen from \$64 billion to \$169 billion after adjusting for inflation.<sup>34</sup> Forty-six billion dollars of the increase occurred in only the last two years.<sup>35</sup> And now that Washington has taken over the federal loan system, the Department of Education operates as one of the largest banks in the country, with taxpayers left on the hook. America is fast becoming a society where education is unaffordable, a government loan is an entitlement, default is the norm, and loan forgiveness is the expectation. America needs a new normal, where college is affordable and paying off debt is achievable.

Of course, even the most important skills will lack value unless young graduates enter a growing economy where those skills are in demand. Today, that is not the case. Americans are all too familiar with the employment crisis facing the nation: an unemployment rate stuck above eight percent for 39 straight months, a real unemployment rate nearly twice as high, and millions of people simply giving up on looking for work altogether.<sup>36</sup> But for new graduates, the situation is even worse. Only half of those who have graduated since 2006 currently hold full-time jobs.<sup>37</sup> Only half have jobs that fully utilize the skills they developed.<sup>38</sup> And even during President Obama's so-

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<sup>33</sup> Mike Brownfield, "Morning Bell: A Higher Education Revolution," The Foundry Blog, [Heritage Foundation](#), 1/31/12.

<sup>34</sup> "Table 1: Total Student Aid and Nonfederal Loans Used to Finance Postsecondary Education Expenses in Constant 2010 Dollars (in Millions), 2000-01 to 2010-11," Total Aid - Adjusted for Inflation, Trends In Student Aid 2011, [College Board Advocacy & Policy Center](#), 2011.

<sup>35</sup> "Table 1: Total Student Aid and Nonfederal Loans Used to Finance Postsecondary Education Expenses in Constant 2010 Dollars (in Millions), 2000-01 to 2010-11," Total Aid - Adjusted for Inflation, Trends In Student Aid 2011, [College Board Advocacy & Policy Center](#), 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Economic News Release, "The Employment Situation Summary," [Bureau Of Labor Statistics](#), 5/4/12.

<sup>37</sup> Charley Stone, Carl Van Horn, & Cliff Zukin, "Chasing the American Dream: Recent College Graduates and the Great Recession," John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, [Rutgers University](#), May 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Hope Yen, "1 In 2 New Graduates Are Jobless Or Underemployed," [Associated Press](#), 4/22/12.

called economic “recovery,” these statistics are getting worse.<sup>39</sup> We desperately need an economic turnaround if our education system is to offer the opportunity to succeed that Americans deserve.

## **PART II: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FAILURES**

President Obama did not create the problems in our education system, but he has compounded some, ignored others, and failed to pursue efforts worthy of the challenge's severity and scale. While he has spoken at great length about education — its importance, its challenges, its reforms — his rhetoric has not been matched by action. To the contrary, his approach to education reform is entrenching the very model that has produced today's broken system. President Obama's education policy exhibits the same failings that have been apparent in every facet of his agenda. He believes in more federal bureaucracy and more federal spending. While the stimulus dollars have flowed freely, innovative thinking, collaboration with Congress, and positive results have been in short supply.

### **President Obama's Approach to K-12 Education: Don't Mend It, Just Spend It**

When talking about K-12 education, President Obama often emphasizes what he calls the investments he has made in the future. He touts the billions of dollars he has spent and details a list of supposed accomplishments that his administration has achieved. He is right about one thing: he has spent billions of dollars. However, the vast majority of these dollars have not been invested in implementing the types of reforms required to produce real results. Instead, these taxpayer dollars have aided the very teachers unions that worked to get him elected and that have held back for

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<sup>39</sup> Jessica Godofsky, Cliff Zukin, & Carl Van Horn, “Unfulfilled Expectations: Recent College Graduates Struggle in a Troubled Economy,” John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, [Rutgers University](http://RutgersUniversity), May 2011.

decades the reforms our system so desperately needs. President Obama is not investing in the future; he is spending money borrowed from the future on the past.

President Obama and the teachers unions have a very special relationship. After spending over \$50 million to support the election of President Obama and his fellow Democrats in 2008, the National Education Association (NEA) is doubling down for 2012.<sup>40</sup> They have already endorsed his 2012 re-election campaign, and gone so far as to collect an additional \$10 in mandatory dues from every member this year to support his pursuit of a second term.<sup>41</sup> This is not the type of relationship that produces better results for America's students. But the adults have been rewarded handsomely.

President Obama's penchant for treating more spending as the solution to every problem has aligned well with the NEA's agenda of extracting ever greater government funds. The NEA's \$50 million investment in President Obama and his party was almost immediately rewarded with a nearly \$50 billion stimulus bailout.<sup>42</sup> He followed up with a second bailout of \$10 billion in the summer of 2010.<sup>43</sup> President Obama is proposing more of the same for a second term. His 2013 budget — four years into his so-called economic “recovery” — proposes yet another \$25 billion fund.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, these bailouts have prevented states from facing up to the need for reform or making necessary long-term decisions. In California for example, teachers can retire as early as 50 and the average pension is \$52,000 per year.<sup>45</sup> President Obama claims to have temporarily “saved” jobs in California, by borrowing and spending money that our children must someday pay back. But

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<sup>40</sup> “Top National Donors Based on Combined State and Federal Contributions, 2007-2008,” [Center For Responsive Politics](#), Accessed 5/22/12.

<sup>41</sup> John Ransom, “Obama's Price: \$10 Tax for Union Teachers – You Pay,” [Townhall](#), 5/7/12.

<sup>42</sup> Fact Sheet, “State Fiscal Stabilization Fund,” [Department of Education](#), 2/7/09.

<sup>43</sup> Press Release, “Congress Passes Bill to Provide \$10 Billion to Support 160,000 Education Jobs Nationwide,” [Department of Education](#), Accessed 5/22/12.

<sup>44</sup> “Education Blueprint: An Economy Built To Last,” [The White House](#), 1/27/12.

<sup>45</sup> “CalSTRS Retirement Benefits,” [California Teachers Association](#), Accessed 5/22/12.

now, a few years later, the states are back where they started, in need of more federal dollars to stabilize their budgets. This same pattern is playing itself out across the nation. Rather than saving jobs, President Obama's stimulus has made states vulnerable to larger layoffs and greater fiscal uncertainty.

While funneling federal dollars toward the unions in return for their generous support, President Obama has also withheld dollars from innovative programs that the unions oppose. Consider, for example, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, which gives low-income children increased choice in the form of access to private school. It is not only extremely popular, it is also incredibly successful. While only 55 percent of students in the District's public schools graduate from high school on time, an extraordinary 91 percent of D.C. students using scholarships to attend private school do so.<sup>46</sup> The NEA was so threatened by this program and the freedom it gave parents to leave poorly-performing schools that it sent letters to members of Congress warning that a vote for the program would be considered "unconscionable."<sup>47</sup> Coming from one of the largest political spenders, this was no idle threat. Sadly, but not surprisingly, President Obama's 2013 budget proposal eliminates all funding for the program.<sup>48</sup>

President Obama may understand the problems that plague our education system. He may even understand many of the policies needed to correct these problems. For instance, his administration touts "Race to the Top," funded by more than \$4 billion in stimulus funds and designed to encourage real reform. Governor Romney has strongly supported many of Race to the Top's goals, including the adoption of high quality standards and assessments; recruiting, retaining and rewarding effective teachers; and turning around low-performing schools. But Race to the Top

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<sup>46</sup> Lindsey Burke, "Obama's Budget Ends Funding for D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program," The Foundry Blog, [Heritage Foundation](#), 2/13/12.

<sup>47</sup> "Letter to the Democrats in the House and Senate on DC Vouchers," [National Education Association](#), 3/5/09.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Pershing, "Boehner, Lieberman Ask Obama To Fund D.C. Scholarship Program," [Washington Post](#), 3/22/12.

represented less than five percent of the total stimulus spending on education, the rest of which went to states without concern for reforms and did no more than temporarily prop up a failing status quo.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, Race to the Top was itself poorly designed. 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.<sup>50</sup> Once again, President Obama's excessive federal spending is failing to produce results. Instead, he has only managed to expand the number of federal programs and the amount of federal money spent.

### **President Obama's Approach to Higher Education: Doubling Down on the Problem**

When President Obama speaks to young people about his vision for their future, he invariably forgets to mention that, during his four years as president, their debt has risen and their chances of finding a job have declined. President Obama's attempts to address the skyrocketing cost of college have backfired. While he may understand the problem, he has no idea how to fix it. Instead, he returns over and over again to the old liberal playbook that has driven up tuition rates for decades. He demands from Congress more federal spending, regulation, and control.

In 2010, President Obama decided that the best way to address the growing cost of college was for the federal government to take over the student loan business. Moreover, he decided that

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<sup>49</sup> Sean Cavanagh & Heather Hollingsworth, "Education Budget Cuts: Schools Face Fiscal Cliff As Stimulus Money Runs Out," [Huffington Post](#), 4/6/11.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Petrilli & Tyson Eberhardt, "Obama's Education Record," [Education Next](#), Vol. 12, No. 2, Spring 2012.

the best way to go about it would be to include the provision in his health care reform bill.<sup>51</sup> The decision was not about education reform; rather, it was an accounting gimmick that allowed him to claim that his new multi-trillion dollar entitlement program would somehow reduce the federal deficit. Next, he doubled funding for Pell Grants and created a new tax credit for students worth \$10,000 over four years.<sup>52</sup> And with costs and student debts continuing to increase, President Obama simply capped monthly student loan repayments at 10 percent of monthly income.<sup>53</sup> In spite of these changes, students attending postsecondary programs are more likely to borrow today than they were three years ago, and the average amount borrowed today is increasing.<sup>54</sup>

While Americans will hear President Obama tout these policies as accomplishments, they will hear less from him about the way that flooding colleges with federal dollars only serves to drive tuition higher. And they will hear nothing at all about the way his budget-busting health care reform will drive prices higher still. The Obama Administration likes to blame states for the tuition increases caused by their own reduction of funding for higher education, but those budget cuts are closely linked to the rising cost of health care and the new costs imposed on states by Obamacare as they are forced to cut their education budgets in order to pay for the new entitlement. Education and health care are most states' two biggest expenditures.<sup>55</sup> With Obamacare promising to enroll an estimated 15 million individuals in Medicaid and to force the states to pay for it, states are cutting education spending and increasing tuition.<sup>56</sup> Consider Nevada: that state must find an additional \$300 million to pay for 800,000 new Medicaid enrollees.<sup>57</sup> Unsurprisingly, the state's Higher

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<sup>51</sup> President Obama, "Remarks by the President and Dr. Jill Biden at Signing of Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act," Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria, Virginia, [The White House](#), 3/30/10.

<sup>52</sup> "College Affordability: The Choice," [Obama For America Truth Team](#), 4/23/12.

<sup>53</sup> "College Affordability: The Choice," [Obama For America Truth Team](#), 4/23/12.

<sup>54</sup> Press Release, "Equifax Student Loan Data Shows More Students Borrowing, Returning To School as Job Market Recovery Remains Muted," [Equifax](#), 3/13/12.

<sup>55</sup> "Policy Basics: Where Do Our State Tax Dollars Go?" [Center On Budget And Policy Priorities](#), 3/28/12.

<sup>56</sup> "Updated Estimates For The Insurance Coverage Provisions Of The Affordable Care Act," [CBO](#), March 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey Lawrence, "ObamaCare Will Squeeze Education, Other Needs," [Nevada Business Journal](#), August 2011.

Education Regents just approved an 8 percent tuition increase for 2012 following a 13 percent increase in 2011.<sup>58</sup> As President Obama so often likes to say: “It’s simple math.”

President Obama would like to contrast his approach with Mitt Romney’s. “With the average cost of a four-year public college now exceeding \$17,000 a year, students are worried about how they’ll afford to pay for higher education,” says his campaign. “When it comes to college affordability, the difference between President Obama and Mitt Romney could not be clearer.”<sup>59</sup> This is true, the difference is clear: President Obama has given up on reform and seeks only to borrow and spend more and more of the next generation’s money — claiming to help them today and then sending them the bill tomorrow. Under this approach, the cost of a college education has risen by 25 percent,<sup>60</sup> and student debt has reached a record \$1 trillion.<sup>61</sup>

The choice becomes even clearer when looking beyond college affordability. President Obama’s misguided economic policies have set back an entire generation of young Americans. Those graduating from high school and college over the last several years have faced one of the worst job markets in the nation’s history. Graduation day is a much less joyous affair in a country where employment among young adults is at the lowest level since 1948, the year these statistics were first recorded.<sup>62</sup> More than half of all recent college graduates are jobless or underemployed.<sup>63</sup> Like so much during the President’s so-called “recovery,” these figures continue to get worse.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Takahashi, “Over Student Objections, Regents Raise Undergraduate Tuition 8 Percent,” [Las Vegas Sun](#), 12/2/11.

<sup>59</sup> “College Affordability: The Choice,” [Obama For America Truth Team](#), 4/23/12.

<sup>60</sup> “Trends In College Pricing: 2008,” College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2012; “Trends In College Pricing: 2011,” College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Josh Mitchell & Maya Jackson-Randall, “Student-Loan Debt Tops \$1 Trillion,” [Wall Street Journal](#), 3/22/12.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Taylor et al., “Young, Underemployed, And Optimistic: Coming Of Age, Slowly In A Tough Economy,” [Pew Research Center](#), 2/9/12.

<sup>63</sup> Charley Stone, Carl Van Horn, & Cliff Zukin, “Chasing the American Dream: Recent College Graduates and the Great Recession,” John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, [Rutgers University](#), May 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Jessica Godofsky, Cliff Zukin, Carl Van Horn, “Unfulfilled Expectations: Recent College Graduates Struggle in a Troubled Economy,” John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, [Rutgers University](#), May 2011.

Although President Obama set a goal that America would once again lead the world in postsecondary completion by 2020, we have made minimal progress in that direction.<sup>65</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the President's focus on bureaucracy and spending are not producing the results that America's students deserve and that the world has come to expect from our higher education system.

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President Obama's policies are denying the American Dream to too many of today's youth. He has not only failed to expand opportunity but actively sought to shut it off, he has allowed old-school liberal borrowing and spending on behalf of special interests to take the place of badly needed reform, and he has replaced the promise of a job that once awaited hard-working graduates with only the promise of debt. We must chart a new course if we are to guarantee all citizens genuine opportunity, replace poverty with prosperity, and prepare to compete in the global economy.

### **PART III: MITT ROMNEY'S PLAN FOR REFORM**

As president, Mitt Romney will pursue genuine education reform that puts parents and students' interests ahead of special interests. These reforms will ensure that students have the skills they need to succeed after graduation. To meet this goal, states must give parents the information and choices they need to enroll their children in good schools. Those schools must be held to high standards and be able to hire and retain the best teachers. Students must have diverse and affordable options for higher education that will give them the skills they need to compete in the global

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<sup>65</sup> Valerie Strauss, "Why Obama's 2020 Graduation Goal Isn't Attainable," [Washington Post](#), 2/15/11.

economy, and when they graduate they must be able to find jobs that provide a rewarding return on their educational investment.

### **Mitt Romney's Plan for K-12 Education: Supporting Teachers, Increasing Choice, and Emphasizing Results**

Ensuring that all children in the United States have access to a K-12 education that equips them to pursue their dreams is both a fundamental American value and essential for lasting economic prosperity. Sadly, we have long fallen short in this vital task, especially when it comes to the education of our most disadvantaged students. The cause is not a lack of public investment: as a nation we spend over \$11,000 annually on each student enrolled in K-12 education, more than almost any other country.<sup>66</sup> Nor can we assign blame to those leading our classrooms. American schools are filled with talented and passionate educators who know that the system desperately needs reform and want to be a part of a brighter future for our children. What we need is leadership from state and federal policymakers to free public education from a paralysis that keeps our schools and students from reaching their full potential.

To that end, we must dramatically expand parental choice over the education their children receive and unleash the power of innovation and technology to drive improvement. We must call on states to set high academic standards, hold schools and teachers responsible for results, and ensure that families and taxpayers have accurate information about school performance and spending. And we must reward effective teachers for their excellence in the classroom so that others like them will be attracted into the profession. In short, a Romney Administration's agenda for K-12 education will be organized around the following principles:

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<sup>66</sup> "Table 191. Total And Current Expenditures Per Pupil In Public Elementary And Secondary Schools: Selected Years, 1919-20 Through 2008-09," Digest Of Education Statistics, [National Center For Education Statistics](#), June 2011.

**Promoting Choice and Innovation.** Empowering parents with far greater choice over the school their child attends is a vital component of any national agenda for education reform. To start, low-income and special-needs children must be given the freedom to choose the right school and bring funding with them. These students must have access to attractive options, which will require support for the expansion of successful charter schools and for greater technology use by schools. And parents must have reliable, transparent, user-friendly information on how their own children and their schools are performing. Just as innovation and technology moved the nation into the Information Age, so too can they catapult our schools into the 21st century.

**Ensuring High Standards and Responsibility for Results.** States must have in place standards to ensure that every high school graduate is prepared for college or work and, through annual testing, hold both students and educators accountable for meeting them. The results of this testing, for both their own children and their schools, must be readily available to parents in an easy to understand format. And both parents and taxpayers should have detailed and timely information on school and district spending to ensure accountability for the use of public funds.

**Recruiting and Rewarding Great Teachers.** A world-class education system requires world-class teachers in every classroom. Research confirms that students assigned to more effective teachers not only learn more, but they also are also less likely to have a child as a teenager and more likely to attend college.<sup>67</sup> Policies for recruitment, evaluation, and compensation should treat teachers like the professionals they are, not like interchangeable widgets. We must eliminate barriers to becoming a teacher that are based on credentials unrelated to classroom effectiveness. We must reward those teachers who contribute the most to student learning and provide them with advancement opportunities. And we must insist on contract provisions that allow for the removal of those educators who are unable to do the job effectively.

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<sup>67</sup> Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Jonah E. Rockoff, "The Long-Term Impacts of Teachers: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood," [National Bureau Of Economic Research](#), December 2011.

## **THE FEDERAL ROLE**

Achieving this vision will require a partnership between the states and the federal government. As Tennessee Senator and former U.S. Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander wisely notes, “there is a difference between a national concern, which education is, and a federal government solution driven by Washington.”<sup>68</sup> Overly prescriptive federal policy mandates have a chilling effect on state and local efforts to improve schools by diverting resources toward compliance with the letter of the law, not its underlying intent. Federal fiscal requirements too often stifle local innovation and prevent spending on effective programs for fear of triggering federal audits.

As a former governor, Mitt Romney knows that states and localities are best-positioned to reform their education systems and must take the lead in implementing these core principles free of federal micromanagement. Under Romney’s leadership as governor, Massachusetts expanded parental choice,<sup>69</sup> maintained high standards,<sup>70</sup> and sought to hold schools and teachers responsible for their performance.<sup>71</sup> During his tenure, Massachusetts became the first state to lead the nation in both reading and math in both fourth and eighth grade<sup>72</sup> and fared well against the top nations in math and science.<sup>73</sup> Other states, such as Florida under Governor Jeb Bush, have made dramatic progress in closing race- and income-based achievement gaps by embracing these same principles. In the past year, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal have advanced similarly ambitious reforms expanding choice and accountability.

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<sup>68</sup> Lamar Alexander, “NCLB Lessons,” [Education Week](#), 1/5/12.

<sup>69</sup> “Romney Celebrates Charter Schools As He Adds Three, Extends Eight,” Associated Press, 5/3/06.

<sup>70</sup> Sam Dillon, “Bush Education Law Shows Mixed Results In First Test,” *New York Times*, 10/20/05.

<sup>71</sup> Scott S. Greenberger & Scott Helman, “Romney Proposes \$200M For Health,” *Boston Globe*, 1/19/06.

<sup>72</sup> Sam Dillon, “Bush Education Law Shows Mixed Results In First Test,” *New York Times*, 10/20/05.

<sup>73</sup> “Why Massachusetts Students, the Best in the U.S., Lag Behind Best-in-the-World Students of Hong Kong,” [American Institutes For Research](#), 2012.

Yet Romney also knows that the federal government cannot ignore the troubled state of American K-12 education. The federal government is uniquely positioned to provide financial support for the education of our neediest students and to require states and districts to tell the truth about how their schools and students are performing. Washington also has a critical role to play in enhancing competition among education providers by eliminating local education monopolies and supporting choice for parents and students. A Romney Administration will align federal funding and policies with the principles of expanded choice and innovation, high standards and accountability, and emphasis on recruiting and rewarding excellent teachers.

### **PROMOTING CHOICE AND INNOVATION**

Through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal government provides more than \$25 billion of financial support annually for the education of high-need students.<sup>74</sup> These two programs account for roughly two-thirds of baseline federal spending on K-12 education,<sup>75</sup> but have largely failed to achieve their desired results — namely, improved student achievement.<sup>76</sup> We need a new approach, one that expands parental choice by attaching federal funding to the students it is intended to support rather than dispersing it to districts through complex, politically-motivated formulas.

A Romney Administration will work with Congress to overhaul Title I and IDEA so that low-income and special-needs students can choose which school to attend and bring their funding

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<sup>74</sup> "FY 2012 Appropriations," [U.S. Department Of Education](#), 2/13/12.

<sup>75</sup> "FY 2013 President's Budget Overview," [U.S. Department Of Education](#), 3/2/12; "Table 5.1—Budget Authority by Function and Subfunction: 1976–2017," Historical Tables, Office of Management and Budget, [The White House](#), Accessed 5/22/12.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew J. Coulson, "President To Call For Big New Ed. Spending- Here's A Look At How Well That's Worked In The Past," [CATO](#), 1/27/10.

with them. The choices offered to students under this policy will include any district or public charter school in the state, as well as private schools if permitted by state law. Eligible students remaining in public schools will also have the option to use federal funds to purchase supplemental tutoring or digital courses from state-approved private providers rather than receiving Title I services from their district. To ensure accountability, students using federal funds to attend private schools will be required to participate in the state's testing system.

Choice is only valuable if good choices are available. To expand the supply of high-performing schools in and around districts serving low-income and special-needs students, states accepting Title I and IDEA funds will be required to take a series of steps to encourage the development of quality options: First, adopt open-enrollment policies that permit eligible students to attend public schools outside of their school district that have the capacity to serve them. Second, provide access to and appropriate funding levels for digital courses and schools, which are increasingly able to offer materials tailored to the capabilities and progress of each student when used with the careful guidance of effective teachers. And third, ensure that charter school programs can expand to meet demand, receive funding under the same formula that applies to all other publicly-supported schools, and access capital funds.

Charter schools are public schools of choice that are run independently and freed from many of the rules and regulations governing traditional school districts. Thanks to a strong and growing bipartisan base of support, the charter movement is over 5,600 schools strong and serves more than two million students in 41 states and Washington, D.C.<sup>77</sup> While the performance of individual charter schools in improving student achievement varies, the most successful among them are having dramatically positive effects while working with some of the nation's most disadvantaged students. A growing number of charter and education management organizations

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<sup>77</sup> Laura McMullen, "Marking 20 Years Of Charter Schools," [US News & World Report](#), 5/9/12.

are taking these effective models to scale. Under a Romney Administration, more funds will be allocated to grow the number of high-quality charter schools and create the conditions under which they can flourish.

The successful D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has put into practice many of these principles in our nation's capital. Enacted by Congress with the support of local elected officials, the program offers 1,600 students scholarships to attend private schools of their choice.<sup>78</sup> The U.S. Department of Education's official evaluation of the program confirms that it dramatically increased graduation rates for scholarship recipients.<sup>79</sup> The program also saves taxpayers money because scholarship amounts are substantially less than per-pupil spending in D.C. Public Schools.<sup>80</sup> Despite these promising results, President Obama eliminated funding for the program in his latest budget.<sup>81</sup> A Romney Administration will expand the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, offering more students a chance to attend a better school and providing a model of parental choice for the nation.

This unprecedented series of steps will use the power of parental choice to hold our education system responsible for results and set in motion the innovation we so desperately need. Our state and local leaders dedicated to reform will finally be equipped to implement real change, and our best educators will finally have the outlets they need to translate their commitment and creativity into opportunities for children. When this expanded choice is coupled with greater transparency, and an overriding emphasis on placing a quality teacher in every classroom, America will finally be able to ensure a chance for every child.

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<sup>78</sup> Lindsey Burke, "Obama's Budget Ends Funding for D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program," The Foundry Blog, [Heritage Foundation](#), 2/13/12.

<sup>79</sup> "Evaluation Of The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report," [National Center For Education Evaluation And Regional Assistance](#), June 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Lindsey Burke, "Obama's Budget Ends Funding for D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program," The Foundry Blog, [Heritage Foundation](#), 2/13/12.

<sup>81</sup> Ben Pershing, "Boehner, Lieberman Ask Obama To Fund D.C. Scholarship Program," [Washington Post](#), 3/22/12.

## **ENSURING HIGH STANDARDS AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESULTS**

With the 2002 enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), President George W. Bush and leaders of both parties in Congress took an important step toward ensuring accountability for results in American public education. As a result of NCLB, standards, assessments, and data systems are light-years ahead of where they were a decade ago. There is a new focus on ensuring all students are meeting grade-level expectations and, thanks to the requirement that schools report achievement data for student subgroups, schools can no longer hide an achievement gap behind high average scores. Student achievement has risen steadily since the law's enactment, especially among disadvantaged students, and research confirms that the law's testing and accountability requirements can account for much of this progress.<sup>82</sup>

After ten years, however, it is clear that this legislation has its weaknesses as well. The law's insufficiently granular approach to accountability, through which schools are only classified as making or not making Adequate Yearly Progress based on student proficiency rates, fails to accurately identify those schools that are contributing the most or least to student learning. By focusing only on minimum grade-level performance, schools are not recognized for contributing to students' progress beyond that goal. Moreover, the law is overly prescriptive in telling states and districts how to manage schools identified as needing improvement. The lackluster implementation and disappointing results of restructuring efforts confirms that the federal government is poorly positioned to intervene directly on behalf of school improvement at the local level. The Obama Administration's refusal to work with Congress to address these challenges represents a clear failure of leadership.

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<sup>82</sup> John Chubb, "The Future Of No Child Left Behind," [Education Next](#), Vol. 9, No. 3, Summer 2009.

A Romney Administration will work closely with Congress to strengthen NCLB by reducing federal micromanagement while redoubling efforts to provide transparency and accountability. The school interventions required by NCLB will be replaced by a requirement that states provide parents and other citizens far greater transparency about results. In particular, states will be required to provide report cards that evaluate schools and districts on an A through F or similar scale based primarily on their contribution to achievement growth. These report cards will provide accurate and easy-to-understand information about student and school performance, as well as information about per-pupil spending in the local district. States will continue to design their own standards and tests, but information on the state's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) performance will appear on the school and district report cards, and the grading system will be standardized so that states with poor NAEP performance cannot assign artificially high grades to their schools. States will also continue to disaggregate and report achievement levels by student subgroup for each subject, and within each school and district.

The combination of high standards, greater transparency, and the expansion of choice described above will create unprecedented accountability throughout the education system. States will have the freedom to pave a path toward excellence and parents will be empowered with the information needed to make good choices about their children's education.

## **RECRUITING AND REWARDING GREAT TEACHERS**

A school is only as strong as its teachers, but the most promising teachers too often find it difficult even to reach the classroom door, let alone receive recognition for their efforts once inside. Federal agencies spend over \$4 billion dollars each year on more than 80 different teacher quality programs, with little to show in terms of results.<sup>83</sup> Title II alone sends over \$2 billion to states

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<sup>83</sup> "Opportunities To Reduce Potential Duplication In Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, And Enhance Revenue," [Government Accountability Office](#), March 2011.

annually,<sup>84</sup> with the funds spent primarily on class-size reduction and low-intensity professional development programs that exhibit no evidence of improved classroom performance.<sup>85</sup> NCLB went further, requiring that all teachers of core academic subjects be “highly qualified.” Although well-intentioned, there is no evidence that this “certification” requirement is an indicator of teacher effectiveness. Instead, the primary effect of the requirement has been to add additional time-consuming procedures that ironically prevent some of the most highly-qualified individuals from ever entering the profession.

A Romney Administration will eliminate the NCLB’s ineffective “highly qualified” certification requirement altogether and instead focus on rewarding states and districts that actually attract and reward highly-effective teachers and remove ineffective ones from the classroom. Romney will consolidate the myriad teacher quality programs and offer funding as a single block grant for states that adopt policies focused on improving teacher effectiveness. For instance, states seeking block grants will be required to establish evaluation systems based in part on effectiveness in advancing student achievement, reward effective teachers and principals with additional compensation and advancement opportunities, eliminate or reform teacher tenure, streamline the certification process for becoming a teacher, and prohibit seniority-based transfer and dismissal rules (including Last In, First Out layoffs).

These reforms will transform the teaching profession from one burdened by bureaucracy, focused on certification, and evaluated based on years of service to one that attracts the best and the brightest, builds crucial skills, and rewards effective performance.

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<sup>84</sup> "FY 2013 President's Budget Overview," [U.S. Department Of Education](#), 3/2/12.

<sup>85</sup> Robin Chait & Raegen Miller, "Ineffective Uses of Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title II Funds," [Center For American Progress](#), 8/4/09.

The elements of this plan share a straightforward, common goal: give each student, each teacher, and each school the opportunity to succeed. Schools and districts will have the flexibility and incentive to attract and retain the best teachers, those teachers will be rewarded for their performance instead of their tenure, and students will have the power to seek them out. Parents will have the information they need to hold school administrators accountable and make the right decisions for their children. States will remain in control of implementing reforms. By emphasizing choice, accountability, and teacher quality, instead of simply throwing more money at challenges that have long since proven themselves unresponsive to increased spending, we can build an education system worthy of our next generation.

### **Mitt Romney's Plan for Higher Education: A New Vision of Affordable and Applicable Learning**

America's higher education system is recognized throughout the world for its superior quality. However, a flood of federal dollars is driving up costs and burdening too many young Americans with too much debt and too few opportunities. Meanwhile, other models of advanced skills training are becoming ever more important to success in the American economy, and new educational institutions will be required to fill those roles. A Romney Administration will address these challenges by improving access and affordability, promoting innovation, and ensuring transparency about performance.

#### **ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY**

The shared effort of states and the federal government to provide more support for higher education and reduce the cost for students is being overwhelmed by the constant inflation in tuition rates. This country is putting more money into higher education than at any point in history, yet a postsecondary education continues to become more expensive for students and their families. A

Romney Administration will tackle this challenge by making clear that the federal government will no longer write a blank check to universities to reward their tuition increases, and by supporting institutions that are pursuing innovative operating models to drive down costs.

To achieve these goals, the federal financial aid system must be simplified. Today it is unnecessarily complex, made up of multiple need-based grant programs, competing loan programs, and duplicative tax benefits, all of which include significant administrative costs. A Romney Administration will eliminate programs that are duplicative, inefficient, or ineffective and concentrate available funds directly on helping students. For instance, as a result of the expanding entitlement mentality, the Pell Grant program — the foundation of the federal investment in student financial aid — is on unsure financial footing. To keep up with the program's massive increases, the government has been forced to take steps such as eliminating subsidized loans for graduate students. A Romney Administration will refocus Pell Grant dollars on the students that need them most and place the program on a responsible long-term path that avoids future funding cliffs and last-minute funding patches.

Students and their families must also be given the information they need to intelligently weigh the costs and benefits of the many options available to them. Better information about products and services helps consumers make more informed choices, and nowhere is this as important as when students consider a postsecondary education. Despite requirements that colleges and universities report volumes of data to the U.S. Department of Education, there is no simple way for students to access that data and interpret its implications. A Romney Administration will eliminate unnecessary data collection requirements and partner with existing private-sector entities to create consumer-friendly data on the success of specific institutions of higher education. Students should make decisions with full understanding of data points such as completion and persistence, loan repayment rates, and future earnings. In turn, these ratings can be used by private lenders to

evaluate the risks of lending to students at these institutions, creating incentives for schools to focus on factors related to student success.

Last but not least, families must be supported in their efforts to plan ahead and save for their children's higher education. A Romney Administration will aim to increase the opportunity to save and invest for higher education, particularly for low- and moderate-income families. With better information and more affordable options, financing higher education can once again become an attractive opportunity instead of an overwhelming burden.

### **PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION**

When the Obama Administration and the Democratic Congress nationalized the student loan market, they drove away private lenders and moved a trillion-dollar obligation to the federal balance sheet. A Romney Administration will embrace a private-sector role in providing information, financing, and education itself, working with effective businesses to support the goals of students and their families. For instance, while President Obama's idea of sound advice to student borrowers is a promise that their loans will be forgiven if they cannot afford to repay them, Romney supports private-sector involvement to ensure students are clearly informed about their obligations when they apply for federal student loans, and that they receive support that goes beyond a call from a collections agent to help keep them on track to repayment.

### **LESS REGULATION, MORE INNOVATION**

The hallmark of the U.S. economy is its constant ability to innovate, to develop and deliver new products and services, and to offer ever-increasing quality to consumers at an ever-lower cost. Our colleges and universities have been a significant part of the innovation driving our economic growth for the past century, helping to develop the basic research and related patents behind everything from communications technologies to medical treatments to energy sources.

Unfortunately, the innovative spirit of university laboratories has not always spilled over into the operation of these same institutions. Our higher education system must be built around a dynamic and innovative core that relentlessly pursues new ideas, progress, and success. Online enrollment has opened doors to millions of new students, helping to increase not only access to education but also the number of students completing a degree. New forms of instructional delivery promise to provide access to new generations of students, which will be crucial to our future economic success. Government policies, however, have not embraced differentiated modes of delivery. Ill-advised regulation imposed by the Obama Administration, such as the so-called “Gainful Employment”<sup>86</sup> rule, has made it even harder for some providers to operate while distorting their incentives.

Regulations should be geared toward a 21st century higher education system, allowing for greater innovation by institutions to reach all of the students who aspire to attain a postsecondary certificate or degree. Rather than adding complicated and unnecessary regulations, the federal government should allow consumers in the market to make their own choices while providing the information to make those choices well. This will encourage institutions to seek quality improvements, rather than to create risk mitigation strategies to avoid federal penalties. For example, competence and skills drive our economy, yet our higher education system awards degrees based on the amount of time spent in the classroom regardless of how quickly or slowly an individual masters the material. The current emphasis on time to degree, rather than measured competency, discourages more innovative learning solutions and continues the frustration of employers who are unable to fill high-skilled positions. Forcing students to complete a fixed term of study also drives up the costs for those who might need less time, while graduating those who have not yet obtained

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<sup>86</sup> Press Release, “Obama Administration Announces New Steps to Protect Students from Ineffective Career College Programs,” [U.S. Department Of Education](#), 6/2/11.

market-ready skills. Federal regulations and aid rules must change to facilitate instead of obstruct models that recognize and address this reality.

Finally, in focusing on reform, we must not lose sight of those policies that are working. The long-term federal investment in basic research within institutions of higher learning has been a crucial engine for innovation in our economy, and one that could not be replicated through other sources of funding. A Romney Administration will maintain a strong commitment to research in the physical, biological, and social sciences and to ensure that the priorities for research funding are not hijacked by short-term political imperatives.

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Our economy is demanding more advanced skills, and more varied skills, every day. Our higher education system must be responsive to these demands if it is to offer students an attractive return on their investment, prepare them for successful careers, and help America compete in the global marketplace. Unfortunately, we are moving in the wrong direction. When recent college graduates are struggling under unprecedented debt burdens, and when only half have even found full-time jobs, the answer is not President Obama's strategy of more government spending for more students to pursue more of the same degrees. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of a more counterproductive response. Romney will pursue genuine reforms that unleash the forces of innovation on our institutions of higher learning, pressing them to improve their education models and forcing them to compete against new entrants with entirely different models. He will also refocus the government on helping prospective students make informed decisions about their financial futures, and facilitating access to reasonable financing. Many facets of American higher education must evolve to meet today's challenges, and Romney's approach will make the government a partner in that effort instead of an obstacle to it.

## CONCLUSION

Our education system is crucial to the vibrancy of our society, the strength of our economy, and the future of our children. It is the single most powerful antidote to poverty, and the single most important determinant of our long-term international competitiveness. It produces not only skills for our economy, but also the foundation of knowledge for our democracy. President Obama has spoken eloquently about the challenges our system faces, and at times identified the principles of choice and accountability that offer the best hope for reform. Unfortunately, like a man with a hammer that sees every problem as a nail, President Obama's policy response to every education challenge has been more federal spending. Increased spending on our K-12 public schools has failed to produce results, and increased spending is already one of higher education's greatest *problems*. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that President Obama has failed to make meaningful progress. Instead, he has succeeded only in pushing state budgets closer to the brink and pushing student budgets over it, all while handsomely repaying teachers unions for their political support.

Unlike President Obama, Mitt Romney understands that more spending is the last thing our schools need. As a former governor with one of the most successful education records in the nation, he understands the challenges that states face and the futility of attempting to spend their way out of them. Romney's reforms will focus on ensuring that money is spent *well*. K-12 schools will transparently report their performance, teachers will be rewarded for theirs, and parents will have the choice to send their children to schools that are performing at a high level. High school graduates will have more varied and affordable choices for postsecondary education that prepares them for successful careers, and the federal government will help to ensure they can finance that investment. With innovation instead of regulation, results instead of rhetoric, and accountable spending instead of just more spending, we can restore America's promise by ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed.