Spotlight on No Child Left Behind

- **President Obama believes providing a high-quality public education for all children is critical to America’s economic future.** The President often emphasizes that the “path to the American Dream depend[s] on providing every child with an education that will enable them to succeed in a global economy.”\(^1\) President Obama is committed to providing every child access to a complete education.\(^2\) The President also believes educators are a crucial part of building and sustaining education reform and fully supports collective bargaining rights.\(^3\) His FY 2013 budget calls for a new “$14 billion one-time strategic investment in key reform areas, including aligning education programs with workforce demands and increasing college affordability and quality.”\(^4\)

- **Newt Gingrich takes the opportunity to slam teachers unions.** “We bought the mistake that the teachers unions actually cared about the kids. It’s increasingly clear they care about protecting bad teachers,”\(^5\) Gingrich argued. Speaking to his larger vision, he went on: “I would, frankly, dramatically shrink the Federal Department of Education down to doing nothing but research, return all the power under the Tenth Amendment back to the states.” In a rare show of GOP solidarity, he echoed Santorum’s comments regarding the federal government. “I agree with Rick’s point. I would urge the states, then, to return most of that power back to the local communities, and I’d urge the local communities to turn most of the power back to the parents.”\(^6\)

- **Mitt Romney supports No Child Left Behind as a way to attack teachers unions.** “We have to stand up to the federal teachers unions and put the kids first and the unions behind.”\(^7\) Romney has avoided the larger question of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) even after each of his opponents declared vociferous opposition to the measure. While his current position is unclear, earlier statements show support. “I happen to be someone who supported No Child Left Behind. I thought it was important for us to finally start testing our kids,”\(^8\) Romney said earlier this year. That position has evolved since his early career. “I said I wanted to eliminate the Department of Education,”\(^9\) Romney explained when on the campaign trail in 2007. “That was my position when I ran for Senate in 1994.” Now, in the midst of a highly contentious Republican primary, his position is reverting. “...[Education] has to be held at the local and state level, not at the federal level. We need get the federal government out of education.”

- **Rick Santorum votes for NCLB, reverses course to blast the law.** “I wish I wouldn’t have voted [for] No Child Left Behind, you’re right, it lead to education spending. That’s why I’ve said that we need to cut and eliminate No Child Left Behind and...education funding from the federal government, move it back to the local level where it belongs where parents and local communities can deal with that.”\(^10\) Santorum initially explained his vote for NCLB as a political move, saying “It was against the principles I believed in, but, you know, when you’re part of the team, sometimes you take one for the team, for the leader, and I made a mistake...I thought testing was—and finding out how bad the problem was—wasn’t a bad idea.”\(^11\) After receiving boos from the audience, Santorum rebranded the vote as a learning experience, focusing in on hard-line conservative values. “I believe the federal government should get out of the education business, I think the state government should start to get out of the education business and put it back to...the local and into the community.”\(^12\)

**NEA Believes**

- The federal government has a vital role to play in providing America’s students with equal access to great public schools, particularly as disparities persist across the nation in student achievement, school funding, and teacher quality.

- ESEA created for the first time a partnership among federal, state, and local governments to address part of the larger national agenda of confronting poverty and its damaging effects by targeting federal aid to poor students and schools. Our country cannot walk away from that commitment at a time when there are more students and families in poverty than ever. The federal government must balance its support of states and local school districts’ efforts with its critical role in ensuring equitable access to a quality education so that students in need have what they deserve to thrive in today’s society.

- NCLB distorted earlier interpretations of the federal role and the U.S. of Department of Education’s mission. While the law’s broad goals and commitment to closing achievement gaps should be applauded, NCLB disregards the realities of school, district, and state capacity and practice and requires unrealistic outcomes without supplying the requisite support and resources.

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\(^{1}\) “Education,” [WhiteHouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).


\(^{3}\) “Presidential Proclamation,” Office of the Press Secretary, [The White House](http://www.whitehouse.gov), 9/2/11


\(^{5}\) [Republican Debate, Arizona, 2/22/2012](http://www.c-span.org/video/?id=17652-1)

\(^{6}\) [Republican Debate, Arizona, 2/22/2012](http://www.c-span.org/video/?id=17652-1)

\(^{7}\) [Republican Debate, Arizona, 2/22/2012](http://www.c-span.org/video/?id=17652-1)

\(^{8}\) In his own words: GOP presidential primary candidate Mitt Romney, [Detroit Free Press](http://www.freep.com), 2/16/2012

\(^{9}\) [Republican Debate, Arizona, 2/22/2012](http://www.c-span.org/video/?id=17652-1)

\(^{10}\) [Republican Debate, Arizona, 2/22/2012](http://www.c-span.org/video/?id=17652-1)

\(^{11}\) [Republican Debate, Arizona, 2/22/2012](http://www.c-span.org/video/?id=17652-1)

\(^{12}\) [Republican Debate, Arizona, 2/22/2012](http://www.c-span.org/video/?id=17652-1)