



## The Views of President Obama and Governor Romney on the Federal Role in Education



The National School Boards Action Center (NSBAC) is a not-for-profit organization founded by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) to advocate at the federal and national levels for the advancement of public education, local school board leadership and excellence and equity in our nation's public schools. Across the nation, 90,000 local school board members are responsible for governing nearly 14,000 school systems serving 50 million public school students.



## The Presidential Candidates' Positions on Education

Both Presidential candidates, Republican Governor Mitt Romney and Democratic President Barack Obama, as elected officials, have track records in education. On May 23, Governor Romney issued his plan on education, entitled A Chance for Every Child.

The President's plan and record are derived principally from his blueprint to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the principles set forth in the Race To The Top program, the design of his competitive grant programs, his No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver program, and his budget proposals.

The two candidates support holding schools accountable, ensuring states have high standards, strengthening teacher quality, expanding charter schools, transparency on public reporting of school and district data, and focusing a greater share of federal education funding on innovation and reform. But they differ in some areas of critical importance to school boards. At the federal level, Governor Romney supports vouchers, state efforts to eliminate or reform teacher tenure, eliminating or at least scaling back the U.S. Department of Education, and lessening federal regulation. President Obama has established a record for a more expansive federal role, including direction to states and local school districts in how they address standards, assessments, teacher effectiveness, and approaches to turning around the lowest performing schools. The following chart and summary provide more details on their positions and those of the National School Boards Action Center.

*Note: The materials presented here are based on the candidates' websites, speeches, news reports and their record. Details in funding levels and policies are not available on some proposals. NSBAC does not endorse any candidates.*



## Part I: Standards, Testing, Accountability and Program Initiatives

Issue	President Barack Obama	Governor Mitt Romney	NSBAC Position
<b>Academic Standards</b>	<p>Supports rigorous academic state standards through common core standards developed by states as a group and state consortia to assess student performance.</p> <p>Does not believe the federal government should develop academic standards.</p>	<p>Promotes rigorous academic standards. Supports conditioning federal funds to cause states to develop their own high academic standards.</p>	<p>NSBAC supports high standards voluntarily developed by states or consortia of states, but opposes conditioning federal assistance to the adoption of any specific standards or process for evaluating standards.</p>
<b>Testing</b>	<p>Supports holding schools accountable. Believes current law needs major changes including testing for English learners and students with disabilities and improving assessments to measure higher-order skills. Supports states coming together around common tests in key subjects. Supports assessing science.</p>	<p>Supports holding schools accountable through state-developed testing in grades 3-8 and high school. Calls for changes in testing for English language learners and students with disabilities.</p> <p>Supports high school exit exams and assessing science.</p>	<p>NSBAC supports rigorous state assessments that are aligned with standards, provided that any state test is only used for the purpose for which it is designed, and is one of multiple measures when used to determine accountability for teachers and schools for student achievement.</p>
<b>Accountability</b>	<p>Supports including student growth models in determining school accountability.</p> <p>Supports improving accountability system by focusing on helping schools rather than on punishments. Would retain NCLB school improvement models, but only for the lowest performing schools.</p>	<p>Believes NCLB was a good beginning but needs to be changed, especially to eliminate micro-management—including federally mandated school improvement models for low performing schools. Supports a strong report card system for student performance with a clear public reporting of school and school district achievement using an A-F grading system based on state assessments that measure growth. Results would be coordinated with NAEP test results.</p>	<p>NSBAC supports an accountability system based on multiple assessments and measures, including growth, and that disaggregates data for traditionally under represented groups of students, clearly reports to parents and the public, rewards success, and provides flexibility and support to address locally designed strategies for raising low performance.</p>

Issue	President Barack Obama	Governor Mitt Romney	NSBAC Position
<p><b>Vouchers/Choice</b></p>	<p>Opposes using tax dollars for private school vouchers, has consistently spoken against them and zeroed out funding in his FY 2013 budget proposal for the D.C. voucher program – but in June, 2012, agreed to continuing the program and allowing new students to enroll.</p> <p>Supports expanding charter schools including eliminating state caps, and provides incentives to states that do so in funding competitive grant programs and granting NCLB waivers.</p>	<p>Supports school choice, including using Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds for a voucher-like system that permits students enrolled in these programs to attend any public school they choose (out of district, charter or online course) or to engage in on-line tutoring, as well as a private school if permitted by state law.</p> <p>Supports more funding for successful charter school networks run by education management organizations, virtual schools, and eliminating state caps on the number of charter and digital schools that can be established.</p> <p>Would expand the D.C. voucher program and use it as a model for the country.</p>	<p>NSBAC opposes vouchers and supports charter schools provided that a) they are authorized by the school board in the school district where they are located, b) do not individually or collectively result in financial cuts for traditional public schools so as to compromise their educational effectiveness, and c) are subject to appropriate fiscal and educational accountability and evaluation requirements.</p>
<p><b>Early Childhood Education</b></p>	<p>Supports a seamless and comprehensive set of services and support for children from birth to school entry.</p> <p>Encourages states to adopt high standards for voluntary universal preschool, including competitive grants to several states to strengthen state preschool standards and teacher quality, but has not proposed a locally based program with new funding to help establish and sustain school district programs.</p>	<p>As Governor of Massachusetts, he created an office for early education but cut early education and pre-K funding, and vetoed \$10 million for kindergarten expansion.</p>	<p>NSBAC supports federal initiatives to establish and maintain voluntary pre-school programs in local school districts. Funding for these initiatives must not come at the expense of funding for K-12 programs. NSBAC also supports requiring Head Start and other federal pre-school programs operated by other agencies to coordinate their curriculum and programs with the local school district in their community so that all children served are prepared to succeed in their local public schools.</p>

Issue	President Barack Obama	Governor Mitt Romney	NSBAC Position
-------	------------------------	----------------------	----------------

**Other Program Initiatives**

Supports initiatives to prepare low-income students for college, including grants for expanding access to higher level courses, teacher/principal development, and innovations in low income schools.

Opposes bilingual education favoring English language immersion.

NSBAC supports a wide range of initiatives to ensure college and career readiness for all students with the expectation that federal grants will provide local flexibility in determining and designing strategies, require only essential regulation and reporting, and provide adequate and sustained funding commensurate with the needs of the students and schools involved and the time they will need to achieve success.

**Overall Plan**

ESEA proposal is contained in the President's Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and has evolved through the Department of Education's Race to the Top and NCLB regulatory waiver program.

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

The plan, A Chance for Every Child, provides a sense of direction more than a detailed program, but what is presented is aligned with House Education and the Workforce Committee passed bills, H.R. 2989, and 2990 in several significant areas.

[www.mittromney.com](http://www.mittromney.com)

NCLB/ESEA must be overhauled with federal policy developed through the deliberative action of Congress to produce a comprehensive approach and not through piecemeal legislation, or by Department of Education fiat. For specifics of NSBAC's plan to overhaul NCLB/ESEA (See the NSBAC website.)

[www.nsbac.org](http://www.nsbac.org)



## Part II: Teachers/Principals

Issue	President Barack Obama	Governor Mitt Romney	NSBAC Position
<b>General Support to Improve Teaching</b>	<p>Supports competitive grants for recruitment, preparation, placement and induction of promising teachers for high-need schools, subjects, areas and fields.</p> <p>Supports data systems that link information on teacher and principal preparation programs to the job placement, student growth, and retention outcomes of their graduates.</p>	<p>Supports attracting and rewarding effective teachers through increased flexibility and block grants, and consolidating numerous and overlapping federal teacher quality programs. Would offer states flexible block grants if they adopt policies to advance and reward teacher quality, such as eliminating or reforming teacher tenure, establishing evaluation systems that focus on effectiveness in advancing student achievement, prohibiting seniority-based transfer and dismissal rules, and allowing removal of ineffective educators.</p>	<p>NSBAC supports grant programs that provide a wide range of options and local flexibility to strengthen school district programs and innovations in recruitment, professional development, compensation, and innovative approaches to teaching.</p>
<b>Merit Pay</b>	<p>Supports merit pay and other reforms to provide differential compensation and career advancement opportunities to educators who are effective at increasing student achievement, including career ladders, extra pay for more responsibilities and teaching in high-need schools/ subjects, and paid planning time.</p>	<p>Supports merit pay and advancement opportunities for teachers and principals tied to student achievement (i.e., test scores).</p>	<p>NSBAC supports locally determined merit pay and other incentive/reward/professional achievement components in school district compensation systems.</p>



Issue	President Barack Obama	Governor Mitt Romney	NSBAC Position
-------	------------------------	----------------------	----------------

**Alternative Routes to Teaching**

Supports traditional and alternative pathways into teaching, including Teach for America and other alternative programs.

Supports alternative certification to recruit talented teachers.

NSBAC supports research-based alternative professional routes provided programs adequately prepare teachers/principals in subject matter, pedagogy, and management skills to be successful.

**Quality Teacher Requirement and Evaluation**

Retains NCLB’s highly-qualified teacher requirement while states transition to measures of effectiveness.

Provides flexibility to use measures of effectiveness such as student test scores, student growth and classroom observations.

Supports district-level evaluation systems that differentiate teachers and principals by effectiveness, and are developed in collaboration with teachers, principals and other education stakeholders.

Eliminates the NCLB highly-qualified teacher provisions and unnecessary certification barriers for teacher credentialing. Holds teachers accountable, including the use of student test scores to assess teacher effectiveness.

NSBAC supports locally-developed strategies to improve teacher/principal effectiveness, including research-based professional development, evaluation, alternative certification, and credential programs. NSBAC also supports state and locally-determined evaluation systems that include multiple measures of student achievement/growth as a significant factor, as well as greater flexibility in removing ineffective teachers and in the assignment of teachers to schools.



Further, NSBAC supports state and locally-determined qualifications for teachers and supports eliminating, or at least altering, NCLB’s Highly Qualified Teacher requirements to correspond to real world circumstances, including locally determined exceptions.

# Part III: Local Governance

Issue	President Barack Obama	Governor Mitt Romney	NSBAC Position
<p><b>Local Governance</b></p>	<p>Requires specificity/program conditions in grant programs that address four major school improvement principles: a) college and career-ready standards and assessments, b) maintaining data for accountability, c) effective teachers, and d) turning around low performing schools.</p> <p>Waives objectionable NCLB requirements provided that states agree to meeting ED's student achievement goals, strategies and priorities that would impact local school operations.</p>	<p>Supports deregulating federal programs to promote innovation at the state and local levels.</p> <p>Supports conditioning federal aid to states on achieving expanded choice, innovation, and teaching results.</p>	<p>NSBAC supports local flexibility in implementing federal programs and opposes federal requirements or program conditions that usurp the function of local school boards as the elected or appointed local authority for governing the nation's school districts, including opposing federal grant requirements that are unrelated to the purpose of the grant or impose unnecessary reporting, data collection, or administrative burdens on school districts.</p>
<p><b>Union Involvement</b></p>	<p>Emphasizes union and other stakeholder involvement in developing innovative grant programs and NCLB waivers, including union involvement as a condition for and/or sign-off on applications for state Race To The Top grants, NCLB waivers and direct federal to local RTTT grants.</p>	<p>Believes that teacher unions preserve the status quo, impede reform, and insulate teachers from accountability.</p>	<p>NSBAC believes that the relationship between unions and management must be determined at the local level, and should not be dictated at the federal level through regulation or grant requirements/priorities. NSBAC supports information that can be voluntarily adopted by local school boards to focus teacher contracts or teacher related policies on strategies for raising student outcomes.</p>



# Part IV: Education Funding

Issue	President Barack Obama	Governor Mitt Romney	NSBAC Position
<b>Education Funding</b>	<p>Highest domestic priority.</p> <p>The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act added nearly \$100 billion in K-12 funding over two years including more than \$50 billion in ARRA stimulus funds and \$25 billion over existing funding levels for Title I and IDEA. In 2010 another \$10 billion was added for the Education Jobs Fund. These programs were designed as an economic stimulus and support for school districts to offset substantial state and local funding cuts — saving an estimated 160,000 jobs.</p> <p>Proposed another \$25 billion for school construction and \$30 billion for teacher and first responder jobs.</p> <p>Except for stimulus funding, basically level funds existing formula programs with new funding focused on state competitive grants such as Race To The Top for states willing to meet federal priorities for standards, assessments, teacher effectiveness, utilizing student/teacher performance data systems, and turning around low performing schools.</p>	<p>Does not believe there is justification for additional funds, but rather a need for better utilization of funds.</p> <p>Generally supports House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan's budget, which the White House estimates will reduce overall federal spending for education by 5.4% in 2013 and 13.6% in 2014, for a total cut of 19% from FY 2012 levels.</p> <p>In FY 2004, as governor, proposed to level fund education but then in order to reduce a deficit shortfall agreed with a Democratic legislature to cut \$1 billion from the state's overall budget, including \$227 million for public education— which comprised 25% of the state's budget.</p>	<p>NSBAC supports full funding of Title I and IDEA as the top funding priority.</p> <p>Annual funding increases for these broadly based programs and the federal mandates associated with them should not be subordinated to funding for competitive grant programs.</p> <p>NSBAC opposes across-the-board cuts, such as sequestration under the Budget Control Act of 2011, to recognize that it is in the national interest to invest in the long term future of the nation and for America's school children to have a foundation for successful/high wage employment in a globally competitive and technology/information driven marketplace.</p>



# The Education Positions of the Presidential Candidates:

## A Summary

Throughout this election season, President Obama and Governor Romney are campaigning on their visions for moving our nation forward. The United States faces long-term economic challenges as technology reshapes the workplace and other nations compete by growing their skilled workforce and consumer markets to attract businesses to locate within their borders.

School boards and the public need to know how the candidates will use the federal role to help educate our children for successful careers and lives in the future that lies ahead. As a non-incumbent, Romney's plan for education is presented in a campaign white paper that understandably lacks operational detail. Obama's policy direction is more specific as it is based on concrete proposals and executive decisions made over the past four years.

**I**n many respects the candidates' platforms are similar, but they differ in key areas. Obama and Romney both support high state academic standards, rigorous assessments, and using student test scores, including annual growth, for school accountability and to gauge teacher effectiveness. Both support using the federal role to promote innovation and leverage change, including expanding the establishment of charter schools, channeling a greater portion of federal education funds into school reform strategies, rewarding good teachers, and promoting alternate routes to teaching.

Their differences are significant, however. First, Romney would diminish the federal footprint by deregulating programs and perhaps eliminating the Department of Education by folding the function under another agency. Federal funding would not increase, and money for reform strategies would be shifted away from formula programs, like Title I, that he believes are ineffective.

Romney sees coupling support for private sector options with increased parent decision-making as key to improving America's education. He supports vouchers, including allowing students served by Title I and IDEA to have federal funds follow them if they transfer to another school district, a private school where permitted by state law, charter school, or use funds for tutoring or a digital course. By requiring districts to provide clearer information about individual school performance, parents can determine which choice is best for their child. Romney also favors English language immersion over bilingual education.

On the subject of unions, Romney charges that they impede reform and insulate teachers from accountability. He would like to see teacher tenure eliminated or reformed and ineffective teachers removed, but does not specify how the federal role would be used for that purpose.

Regarding funding, Romney is not specific on the bottom-line or specific programs. However, he has expressed general support for the budget plan advanced by his running mate, Paul Ryan. If that plan were applied to education, it would result in a 19 percent cut (5.4 percent in 2013 and 13.6 percent in 2014), according to White House estimates.

Obama envisions a more aggressive role for the federal government, as exemplified by his Race to the Top program and the conditions states had to meet to qualify for No Child Left Behind waivers. Overall, he wants schools to improve by having high college and career-ready standards, more effective teachers, and principals, as well as strategies for turning around low-performing schools.

The president's programs have established detailed criteria, priorities, and implementation requirements for states and school districts. Obama has opposed vouchers, but did support this year's appropriations to expand the program in Washington, D.C. He believes in the value of pre-school programs and supports competitive grants to elevate state program standards and professional instruction.

In the funding area, Obama's record comes into play. He supported substantial funding for education through the 2009 stimulus program, which provided some \$100 billion of funding over two years on top of the regular appropriations, and followed that with a \$10 billion school jobs program in 2010. Subsequently he sought \$25 billion for school construction and \$30 billion for hiring teachers and first responders, but Congress did not pass those measures. His funding proposals for ongoing programs have been relatively flat, with program increases being targeted to competitive grant programs to advance his reform agenda.

As to the unions, the president seeks collaboration between the teacher organizations and school districts to develop student achievement strategies. This includes contract and school personnel policies that tie academic goals with program innovations and teacher recruitment, assignment, evaluation, professional development, promotion, and removal. Incentives for engaging in that collaboration are included as conditions for receiving certain grants, including requiring the teachers unions to sign-off or be a co-applicant with the school board.

In sum, both Obama and Romney would continue a federal role that promotes rigorous standards, assessments, accountability, innovations and strategies to increase teacher effectiveness. By comparison, Romney favors less federal regulation, fewer dollars, and increased reliance on the private sector to provide alternatives to public education. Obama favors a broader scope of the federal role with more direction from Washington, D.C., and more funding, while opposing a nationally-based private school voucher program.

To find out more about what the candidates plan to offer over the next four years to advance American education, see the National School Board Action Center at [www.nsbac.org](http://www.nsbac.org)

(Reprinted from the American School Board Journal; October, 2012)





For further information, visit our website at [www.nsbac.org](http://www.nsbac.org)