



EN ESPAÑOL

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I've visited many schools and spoken to many teachers and students throughout my two decades of public service, but one I'll always remember is my visit to Dodge Elementary School in Chicago just a few years ago.

I was talking with a young teacher there, and I asked her what she saw as the biggest challenge facing her students. She gave me an answer that I had never heard before. She spoke about what she called "These Kids Syndrome" - the tendency to explain away the shortcomings and failures of our education system by saying that "these kids can't learn" or "these kids don't want to learn" or "these kids are just too far behind." And after awhile, "these kids" become somebody else's problem.

And this teacher looked at me and said, "When I hear that term it drives me nuts. They're not 'these kids.' They're our kids. All of them."

She's absolutely right. The small child in Manchester or Nashua whose parents can't find or afford a quality pre-school that we know would make him more likely to stay in school, and read better, and succeed later in life - he is our child.

The little girl in rural South Carolina or the South Side of Chicago whose school is literally falling down around her, and can't afford new textbooks, and can't attract new teachers because it can't afford to pay them a decent salary - she is our child.

The teenager in suburban Boston who needs more skills and better schooling to compete for the same jobs as the teenager in Bangalore or Beijing - he is our child.

These children are our children. Their future is our future. And it's time we understood that their education is our responsibility. All of us.

This is a defining moment for our generation. Revolutions in communications and technology have created a global economy of high-tech, high-wage jobs that can be located anywhere there's an internet connection - an economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge.

Education is now the currency of the Information Age. It's no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success - it's a pre-requisite. There simply aren't as many jobs today that can support a family where only a high school degree is required. And if you don't have that degree, there are even fewer jobs available that can keep you out of poverty.

In this kind of economy, countries who out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow. Already, China is graduating eight times as many engineers as we are. By twelfth grade, our children score lower on math and science tests than most other kids in the world. And we now have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation in the world.

Well I do not accept this future for America. I do not accept an America where we do nothing about six million students who are reading below their grade level - an America where sixty percent of African-American fourth graders aren't even reading at the basic level.

I do not accept an America where only twenty percent of our students are prepared to take college-level classes in English, math, and science - where barely one in ten low-income students will ever graduate from college.

I do not accept an America where we do nothing about the fact that half of all teenagers are unable to understand basic fractions - where nearly nine in ten African-American and Latino eighth graders are not proficient in math. I do not accept an America where elementary school kids are only getting an average of twenty-five minutes of science each day when we know that over 80% of the fastest-growing jobs require a knowledge base in math and science.

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This kind of America is morally unacceptable for our children. It's economically untenable for our future. And it's not who we are as a country.

We are not a 'these kids' nation. We are the nation that has always understood that our future is inextricably linked to the education of our children - all of them. We are the country that has always believed in Thomas Jefferson's declaration that "...talent and virtue, needed in a free society, should be educated regardless of wealth or birth."

It's this belief that led America to set up the first free public schools in small New England towns. It's a promise we kept as we moved from a nation of farms to factories and created a system of public high schools so that everyone had the chance to succeed in a new economy. It's a promise we expanded after World War II, when America gave my grandfather and over two million returning heroes the chance to go to college on the GI Bill.

And when America has fallen short of this promise - when we forced Linda Brown to walk miles to a dilapidated Topeka school because of the color of her skin; it was ordinary Americans who marched and bled; who took to the streets and fought in the courts until the arrival of nine little children at a Little Rock school made real the decision that in America, separate can never be equal.

That's who we are. That's why I can stand here today. Because somebody stood up when it was hard; stood up when it was risky. Because even though my mother didn't have a lot of money, scholarships gave me the chance to go to some of the best schools in the country. And I am running for President of the United States because I want to give every American child the same chances that I had.

In this election - at this defining moment - we can decide that this century will be another American century by making an historic commitment to education. We can make a commitment that's more than just the rhetoric of a campaign - one that's more than another empty promise made by a politician looking for your vote.

I often say that the problem with No Child Left Behind is that George Bush left the money behind. And it wasn't just him, either. It's pretty popular to bash No Child Left Behind out on the campaign trail, but when it was being debated in Congress four years ago, my colleague Dick Durbin offered everyone a chance to vote so that the law couldn't be enforced unless it was fully funded. Senator Edwards and Senator Clinton passed on that chance, and I believe that was a serious mistake.

Because I think we'd all agree that the goals of this law were the right ones. Making a promise to educate every child with an excellent teacher is right. Closing the achievement gap that exists in too many cities and rural areas is right. Making sure that necessary resources and qualified teachers are distributed equitably among every city and small town is right. More accountability is right. Higher standards are right.

But I'll tell you what's wrong with No Child Left Behind. Forcing our teachers, our principals, and our schools to accomplish all of this without the resources they need is wrong. Promising high-quality teachers in every classroom and then leaving the support and the pay for those teachers behind is wrong. Labeling a school and its students as failures one day and then throwing your hands up and walking away from them the next is wrong.

And by the way - don't tell us that the only way to teach a child is to spend most of the year preparing him to fill in a few bubbles on a standardized test. Don't tell us that these tests have to come at the expense of music, or art, or phys. ed., or science. These tests shouldn't come at the expense of a well-rounded education - they should help complete that well-rounded education. The teachers I've met didn't devote their lives to testing, they devoted them to teaching, and teaching our children is what they should be allowed to do.

The fact is, No Child Left Behind has done more to stigmatize and demoralize our students and teachers in struggling schools than it has to marshal the talent and the determination and the resources to turn them around. That's what's wrong with No Child Left Behind, and that's what we must change in a fundamental way.

I want to lead a new era of mutual responsibility in education - one where we all come together for the sake of our children's success; an era where each of us does our part to make that success a reality - parents and teachers; leaders in Washington and citizens all across America.

I won't pretend that this will be easy. We must fix the failures of No Child Left Behind. We must provide the funding we were promised, and give our states the resources they need, and finally meet our commitment to special education. But that alone is not an education policy. It's just a starting point.

A truly historic commitment to education - a real commitment - will require new resources and new reforms. It will require a willingness to break free from the same debates that Washington has been engaged in for decades - Democrat versus Republican; vouchers versus the status quo; more money versus more accountability. And most of all, it will take a President who is honest about the challenges we face - who doesn't just tell everyone what they want to hear, but what they need to hear.

I am running to be that President. And that's why I'm proposing a comprehensive plan to give every American child the chance to receive the best education America has to offer - from the moment

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they're born to the day they graduate college. As President, I will put the full resources of the federal government behind this plan. But to make it a reality, I will also ask more of teachers and principals; parents and students; schools and communities.

A few weeks ago, I introduced my plan to make college affordable by creating a \$4,000 per year refundable tax credit that will cover two-thirds of the tuition at the average public college or university. And yesterday, I unveiled my proposal to strengthen our community colleges by offering new degrees for emerging fields and rewarding schools that graduate more students.

Today, I want to talk about what we can do to prepare every student to succeed in college - preparation that begins at birth and continues with world-class schools, outstanding teachers, and transformative principals.

The first part of my plan focuses on providing quality, affordable early childhood education to every American child.

We know what a difference early childhood programs make in the lives of our kids. Study after study proves that children in these programs - especially low-income children - are more likely to score higher in reading and math, more likely to graduate high school and attend college, more likely to hold a job and more likely to earn more on that job. And for every \$1 we invest in these programs, we get \$10 back in reduced welfare rolls, fewer health care costs, and less crime.

In recent years, states have been able to enroll nearly one million four year olds in pre-Kindergarten programs. That's a great success, but I believe we can do better. We need to enroll more children and we need to start at an even earlier age. Because the fact is, studies show that from the time of conception to the first day of kindergarten, children's development progresses faster than at any other stage of life. By the age of three, 85% of the brain's core structure is already formed. Eighty-five percent.

So here's what we did in Illinois. As a state Senator, I helped create the Illinois Early Learning Council, which launched a program called Preschool for All. This has made us one of the first states to commit to a high quality early learning program that starts helping children from the day they're born. It provides early care and education for new families as well as at-risk infants and toddlers, and offer at-risk three-year olds and all four-year-olds the chance to enroll in pre-Kindergarten programs.

There is no reason we can't and shouldn't replicate this all across America. As President, I will launch a Children's First Agenda that provides care, learning and support to families with children ages zero to five. We'll create Early Learning Grants to help states create a system of high-quality early care and education for all young children and their families. We'll increase Head Start funding and quadruple Early Start to include a quarter of a million at-risk children. I will create a Presidential Early Learning Council to coordinate this effort across all levels of government and ensure that we're providing these children and families with the highest quality programs. And we'll help more working parents find a safe, affordable place to leave their children during the day by improving the educational quality of our child care programs and increasing the child care tax credit. That's how we'll give our kids the best possible start in life, and that's the commitment America will make when I am President.

The second part of my education plan is to recruit, support, and reward teachers and principals to ensure that every school in America is filled with outstanding educators.

We know that from the moment our children step into a classroom, the single most important factor in determining their achievement is not the color of their skin or where they come from; it's not who their parents are or how much money they have.

It's who their teacher is. It's the man or woman who stays past the last bell and spends their own money on books and supplies. It's people like my sister who go beyond the call of duty because she believes that's what makes the extra difference. And it does.

Well if we know how much teaching matters, it's time America started acting like it. It's time we treated teaching like the profession it is. I don't want to just talk about how great teachers are - I want to be a President who rewards them for their greatness.

That starts with recruiting a new generation of teachers and principals to replace the generation that's retiring and to keep up with the record number of students entering our schools. We'll create a new Service Scholarship program to recruit top talent into the profession, and begin by placing these new teachers in areas like the overcrowded districts of Nevada, or struggling rural towns here in New Hampshire, or hard-to-staff subjects like math and science in schools all across the nation. And I will make this pledge as President - if you commit your life to teaching, America will commit to paying for your college education.

To prepare our new teachers, we'll require that all schools of education are accredited, and we'll evaluate their outcomes so that we know which ones are doing the best job at preparing the best teachers. We'll also create a voluntary national performance assessment that actually looks at how prospective teachers can plan, teach, and support student learning, so we can be sure that every new educator is trained and ready to walk into the classroom and start teaching effectively. New Hampshire

is already leading the way here by having designed a performance-based educator preparation system, and the national assessment I'm proposing would help states like this one achieve their goals for state-of-the-art preparation of all teachers .

To support our teachers, we will expand mentoring programs that pair experienced, successful teachers with new recruits. We know that mentoring is one of the most effective ways to retain the one-third of new teachers who leave the profession in the first five years. In states that have tried this, like California, only five percent of new teachers have quit. As President, I will expand these mentoring programs nationwide to give all our teachers the chance to succeed. And I will also make sure that teachers have the conditions in which they can succeed - including excellent principals who support their work, the materials they need to teach effectively, and time to plan and collaborate with one another on improving instruction.

And where they do succeed - where our teachers and principals go above and beyond the call to make a real difference in our children's lives - I think it's time we rewarded them for it.

Cities like Denver have already proven that by working with teachers, this can work - that we can find new ways to increase pay that are developed with teachers, not imposed on them and not just based on an arbitrary test score.

My plan would provide resources to try these innovative programs in school districts all across America. Under my Career Ladder Initiative, these districts will be able to design programs that reward accomplished educators who serve as mentors to new teachers with the salary increase they deserve. They can reward those who teach in underserved places like rural New Hampshire and across urban America. And if teachers acquire additional knowledge and skills to serve students better - if they consistently excel in the classroom - that work can be valued and rewarded as well.

Now, if we do all this and find that there are teachers who are still struggling and underperforming, we should provide them with individual help and support. And if they're still underperforming after that, we should find a quick and fair way to put another teacher in that classroom. Teacher associations and school boards in a number of cities have led the way by developing peer assistance and review plans that do exactly this - setting professional standards that put children first. We owe our teachers that, and we owe our children that.

And while we're at it, let's finally help our teachers and principals develop assessments that teach our kids to become more than just good test-takers. That's why the third part of my plan is to work with our nation's governors and educators to create and use assessments that can improve achievement all across America by including the kinds of research, scientific investigation, and problem-solving that our children will need to compete in a 21st century knowledge economy.

New Hampshire has been a leader on this. You've developed innovative assessments, including digital portfolios, to develop and demonstrate student proficiency in technology, science, and other core content areas, and there's no reason we can't start replicating this all across the country.

The goal of educational testing should be the same as medical testing - to diagnose a student's needs so you can help address them. Tests should not be designed as punishment for teachers and students, they should be used as tools to help our children grow and compete. Tests should support learning, not just accounting. Because if we really want our children to become the great inventors and problem-solvers of tomorrow, our schools shouldn't stifle innovation, they should let it thrive.

One of the subject areas where this is especially important is science. No Child Left Behind's intense emphasis on teaching to the test has been shown to reduce the amount of time spent on teaching and assessing science - a subject area that is absolutely critical to our competitiveness as a nation. When I'm President, we will make science instruction a national priority, and we'll develop assessments that don't just test isolated bits of information, but advanced skills like logic, data analysis, and interpretation. New Hampshire has already begun to do this, and there's no reason the rest of the country can't do the same thing.

Finally, as you and I stand here today, know that there is a generation of children growing up on the mean streets and forgotten corners of this country who are slipping away from us as we speak. They walk down Corridors of Shame in rural South Carolina and sit in battered classrooms somewhere in East L.A. They are overwhelmingly black and Latino and poor. And when they look around and see that no one has lifted a finger to fix their school since the 19th century; when they are pushed out the door at the sound of the last bell - some into a virtual war zone - is it any wonder they don't think their education is important? Is it any wonder that they are dropping out in rates we've never seen before?

I know these children. I know their sense of hopelessness. I began my career over two decades ago as a community organizer on the streets of Chicago's South Side. And I worked with parents and teachers and local leaders to fight for their future. We set up after school programs and we even protested outside government offices so that we could get those who had dropped out into alternative schools. And in time, we changed futures.

And so while I know hopelessness, I also know hope. I know that if we bring early education programs to these communities; if we stop waiting until high-school to address the drop-out rate and start in

earlier grades; if we bring in new, qualified teachers; if we expand college outreach programs like GEAR UP and TRIO and fight to expand summer learning opportunities like I've done in the Senate; if we do all this, we can make a difference in the lives of our children and the life of this country - not just in East L.A. or the south side of Chicago, but here in Manchester, and suburban Boston, and rural Mississippi. I know we can. I've seen it happen. And I will work every day to do it again as your President.

But I cannot do it alone. Government cannot do it alone. We can spend billion after billion on education in this country. We can develop a program for every problem imaginable, and we can fund those programs with every last dime we have.

But there is no program and no policy that can substitute for a parent who is involved in their child's education from day one. There is no substitute for a parent who will attend those parent/teacher conferences, make sure their children are in school on time, and help them with their homework after dinner. And I have no doubt that we will still be talking about these problems in the next century if we do not have parents who are willing to turn off the TV once in awhile, and put away the video games, and read to their child. Responsibility for our children's education has to start at home. We have to set high standards for them, and spend time with them, and love them. We have to hold ourselves accountable.

You know a few years ago, a little girl at Earhart Elementary in Chicago was asked the secret to her academic success. She said, "I just study hard every night because I like learning. My teacher wants me to be a good student, and so does my mother. I don't want to let them down."

The challenge we face at this moment is great, but we have met great challenges before. Over the course of two centuries, we have fought and struggled and overcome to expand the promise of a good education ever further - a promise that has allowed millions to transcend the barriers of race and class and background to achieve their God-given potential.

It is now our moment to keep that promise - the promise of America - alive in the 21st century. It's our generation's turn to stand up and say to the little girl in Chicago, or the little boy in Manchester, or the millions like them all across the country that they are not 'these kids' - they are our kids. They do not want to let us down, and we cannot let them down either. That's what I'll be fighting for in this election, and that's what I'll do as President of the United States. I hope you'll join me in that journey. Thank you.

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