

Higher Accountability, not Larger Budget, is Solution to America's Education Crisis

Contributed by Melissa Miller
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The Republican platform was published this week, setting firm precedents for the beliefs and values that will guide the party in the presidential election. Already an essential component of safeguarding our economic future, the excellence of our schools must now maintain the country's reputation for innovation as the global market becomes increasingly competitive. The Republican platform explains why investing in the status quo is no longer enough and why imminent reform is needed.

The Crisis

If anyone could accurately depict the state of education in the United States, it would be U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan. When standardized test scores revealed the United States to be only "average" in accordance to 2009 international rankings, Duncan responded with strong words.

"This is an absolute wake-up call for America," Duncan told The Associated Press. "The results are extraordinarily challenging to us and we have to deal with the brutal truth. We have to get much more serious about investing in education."

Perhaps it was once true that the quality of an educational system could be directly connected to the wealth of the nation; but America's education crisis shows that money cannot buy results. If money were the issue, there would be no problem with the country's education programs. In 2009, the U.S. reportedly spent more per student than almost every other country, the only exception being Luxembourg. Estonia and Poland spent half as much money on education as the United States while spending less than half the amount per student.

One Size Does Not Fit All

The Republican Party adamantly supports the rights of parents in choosing the education of their children, maintaining that a broad, one size fits all approach is much less effective than the personalized decisions parents make for their children. The party also recognizes that parents are consumers and should be able to exercise their rights to choose the right schools for their children, regardless of zip code.

Accountable Educators and Methods

The new platform also supports legislation that will change the basis of what defines a "highly qualified teacher," in hopes of including results in the classroom and not only by credentials. By replacing tenured systems with merit-based approaches to hiring and maintaining staff; the nation's schools could hold current staff accountable while attracting new talent for open positions.

Republicans also support a focus on certain courses that they say have proven key in excellence over the years, such as an emphasis on STEM and business courses.

The Cost of College

In the face of the rising college costs that are financially burdening America's youth, the Republican Party again turns to the freedom of choice as a solution. The GOP stands behind diversifying systems of learning that compete with traditional four year colleges, emphasizing trade colleges, online learning and life-long learning as alternatives. In reference to student loans, the most substantial type of debt held by Americans, the platform says, "The federal government should not be in the business of originating student loans; however, it should serve as an insurance guarantor for the private sector as they offer loans to students." Currently 90 percent of student loan debt stems from student loans. Melissa Miller is blogger and freelance writer for associatedegreeonline.com. She is interested in all things education and writes to help recent college graduates navigate the challenging world of first-time employment, adult responsibility, and finances. Throw your questions to melissamiller831@gmail.com.