

EDUCATION REFORM NOW

The Democratic Party education platform positions with Amendments approved July 9, 2016.

Disclaimer: This document relies on our unofficial transcript of the DNC's meetings on July 8th and 9th based on video made available by C-SPAN. We think it's an accurate transcription but it's possible that the DNC may have recorded these proceedings differently. In applying some of the amendments, we made judgment calls when unsure exactly where the underlying platform was being amended. We created this document solely for the purposes of providing transparency and stimulating discussion and made every attempt to ensure it is as accurate as possible.

Provide Quality and Affordable Education

Higher Education

Democrats believe that if you are an American who wants to get an education, you should always be able to get one: money should never stand in the way. Cost should not be a barrier to getting a degree or credential, and debt should not hold you back after you graduate. Bold new investments by the federal government, coupled with states reinvesting in higher education and colleges holding the line on costs, will ensure that Americans of all backgrounds will be prepared for the jobs and economy of the future. **Every student should be able to go to college debt-free and working families should not have to pay any tuition to go to public college and universities.** We will make community college free, while ensuring the strength of our historically minority-serving institutions. **The federal government will push more colleges and universities to take quantifiable, affirmative steps in increasing the percentages of racial and ethnic minority students, low-income (Pell eligible) and first-generation students they enroll and graduate.** Achieving these goals depends on state and federal investment in both students and their teachers. Whether full-time or adjunct, faculty must be supported to make transformative educational experiences possible. As we make college affordable for future students, we will not forget about the millions of borrowers who need help with their debt right now.

Student Debt

Democrats will allow those who currently have student debt to refinance their loans at the lowest rates possible. We will simplify and expand access to income-based repayment so that no student loan borrowers ever have to pay more than they can afford. And we will significantly cut interest rates for future undergraduates, thereby preventing the federal government from making billions of dollars in profit from student loans. Democrats will also fight for a Student Borrower Bill of Rights to ensure borrowers get adequate information about options to avoid or get out of delinquency or default. We will hold lenders and loan servicers to high standards to help borrowers in default rehabilitate and repay their debts. Finally, Democrats will restore the prior standard in bankruptcy law to allow borrowers with student loans discharge their debts in bankruptcy as a measure of last resort. **To make progress toward these goals, the government should offer a moratorium on student loan payments to all federal loan borrowers so they have the time and get the resources they need to consolidate their loans, enroll in income based repayment programs, and take advantage of opportunities to reduce monthly payments and fees.**

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Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions

We will strengthen our nation's public and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, and other minority-serving institutions by providing a dedicated fund of tens of billions of dollars to keep costs down, provide a quality education, and provide dedicated support to improve student outcomes and completion rates. These schools ~~play an important role in building opportunity and creating a diverse workforce.~~ educate disproportionate of growing populations of Americans; students who are racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students and first generation students. As the nation is grappling with how to expand educational access and increase success, especially for students of color and low-income students and families, there is evidence that the nation's HBCUs and minority serving institutions have honed promising models for educating these students to prepare them for growth, high and critical need positions, while containing costs. We will provide further assistance at these schools, as well as other schools across the country, by restoring year-round Pell funding so that low and middle income students from all backgrounds can get the support they need to make progress toward a college degree throughout the year.

For-Profit Schools

Donald Trump ran a fake university—the now bankrupt Trump “University”—that scammed many out of their hard-earned savings and led to no degree and no obvious benefit to their education or economic prosperity. Democrats will not tolerate this type of fraud. We will also continue to crack down on for-profit schools that take millions in federal financial aid—often as their principal source of revenue—and then exploit students and burden them with debt rather than educating them. That is why we will strengthen the gainful employment rule to ensure that for-profit schools enable students to complete their degrees and prepare them for work. We will go after for-profits that engage in deceptive marketing, fraud, and other illegal practices. It is not right that for-profit schools with low graduation rates keep encouraging their students to take out federal loans they will have trouble paying back.

Early Childhood, Pre-K, and K-12

Democrats believe we must have the best-educated population and workforce in the world. That means making early childhood education a priority, especially in light of new research showing how much early learning can impact life-long success. Democrats will invest in early childhood programs like Early Head Start and provide every family in America with access to high-quality childcare and high-quality pre-K programs.

We will ensure there are great Pre-K-12 schools in every zip code. Democrats are committed to the federal government continuing to play a critical role in working towards an America where a world-class education is available to every child. Democrats believe that a strong public education system is an anchor of our democracy, a propeller of the economy, and the vehicle through which we help all children achieve their dreams. Public education must engage students to be critical thinkers and civic participants while addressing the wellbeing of the whole child.

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Democrats believe that all students should be taught to high academic standards. Schools should receive adequate resources and support. We will hold schools, districts, communities, and states accountable for raising achievement levels for all students—particularly low-income students, students of color, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities.

We are also deeply committed to ensuring we that strike a better balance on testing, so that it informs, but does not drive, instruction. To that end, we encourage states to develop a multiple measures approach to assessment and we believed that standardized tests must meet American Statistical Association standards for reliability and validity. We oppose high-stakes standardized tests that falsely and unfairly label students of color, students with disabilities, and English Language learners as failing, the use of standardized test scores as basis for refusing to fund school or to close schools and the use of student test scores in teacher and principal evaluations, a practice which has been repeatedly rejected by researchers. We support enabling parents to opt their children out of standardized tests without penalty for either the student or the school.

To close the opportunity gap, we also must find ways to encourage mentoring programs that support students in reaching their full potential. Mentoring is a strategy to ensure that children living in poverty have the encouragement and support to aim high and enter the middle class. We will focus on group mentoring, which is a low-cost, high-yield investment that offers the benefit of building a supportive network of peers who push one another towards success.

Democrats know that good teachers are essential to improving student learning and helping all students meet high academic standards. Democrats will launch a national campaign to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, and we will ensure that teachers receive the tools and ongoing professional development they need to succeed in the classroom and provide our children with a world-class education. We also must lift up and trust our educators, continually build their capacity, and ensure that our schools are safe, welcoming, collaborative, and well-resourced places for our students, educators, and communities.

We will invest in high-quality STEAM classes, community schools, computer science education, arts education, and expand linked learning models and career pathways. We will end the school-to-prison pipeline by opposing discipline policies which disproportionately effect students of color and students with disabilities and by supporting the use of restorative justice practices that help students and staff resolve conflicts peacefully and respectfully while helping to improve the teaching and learning environment. And we will work to improve school culture and combat bullying of all kinds. We will encourage restorative justice and reform overly punitive disciplinary practices that disproportionately impact African Americans and Latinos, Native American and Alaskan Native students, students with disabilities, and youth that identify as LGBT.

The Democratic Party is committed to eliminating opportunity gaps, particularly those that lead students from low-income communities to arrive to school on day one of kindergarten several years behind their peers from higher income communities. That means advocating for labor and public assistance laws that ensure poor parents can spend time with their children. This means being committed to increasing the average income in households in poor communities. It means ensuring

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these children have health care, stable housing free of contaminants and a community free of violence, in order to minimize the likelihood of cognitive delays.

It means enriching early childhood programming that increases the likelihood that poor children will arrive to kindergarten with the foundations for meeting the expectations we have for them in the areas of literacy, numeracy, civic engagement and emotional intelligence.

It means we support what it takes to compel states to fund public education equitably and adequately, as well as expand support provided by the Title I formula for schools that serve a large number and high concentration of children in poverty. It means that we support ending curriculum gaps that maintain and exacerbate achievement gaps.

We're also committed to ensuring that schools who educate students in poverty are not unfairly treated for taking on the challenge of serving those kids.

This means an end to the test and punish version of accountability that does no more than reveal the academic gaps created before they reach school.

We support policies that motivate our educators instead of demoralizing them. No school system in the world has ever achieved successful whole school system by leading with punitive accountability. We must replace this strategy with one that will actually motivate and improve their training and professional development in order to get results for all students with an emphasis on equitable results for students of color, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

Democrats are also committed to providing parents with high-quality public school options and expanding these options for low-income youth. We support **democratically governed** great neighborhood public schools and high-quality public charter schools, and we will help them disseminate best practices to other school leaders and educators. Democrats oppose for-profit charter schools focused on making a profit off of public resources. **We believe that high-quality public charter schools should provide options but should not replace or destabilize traditional public schools. Charter schools must reflect their communities, and thus must accept and retain proportionate numbers of students of color, students with disabilities and English language learners in relation to their neighborhood public schools.** We support increased transparency and accountability for all charter schools.