



THEMES in the NEWS

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Tickets to Nowhere: Romney's Education Vouchers

by UCLA IDEA

Presumptive Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney has begun to lay out his education vision. On Tuesday, Romney announced the names of his education policy advisors, whom Diane Ravitch and others see as "a re-run of the George W. Bush administration." A day later Romney paid homage to those predecessors by outlining some favorite Republican ideas from a decade ago.

In a speech to the Latino Coalition's Annual Economic Summit, Romney voiced anger over the state of U.S. public schools—doing so with tones of George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism": "...Millions of kids are getting a third-world education," he said, "and, America's minority children suffer the most. This is the civil-rights issue of our era."

The solution, Romney said, would lie in many of the same reforms that have been touted during the last two administrations. *A Chance for Every Child: Mitt Romney's Plan for Restoring the Promise of American Education*, highlights greater accountability (albeit from states, not the federal government), school report cards, and linking pay to teacher effectiveness. However, Romney's provisions and rhetoric are more strident than past or current administrations. According to a Washington Post blog, "Romney's education vision is based on an ideology that demonizes unions and views the market as the driver of education reform. His program is not based on quality research or best practices."

Most significant was Romney's promise to use vouchers to expand school choice in an "unprecedented way." Romney's vouchers would let parents use Title I and special-education funds to send their students to charters or private schools or access online learning programs.

Some critics have been quick to point out that adding burdens to already cash-strapped districts will not allow them to meet the needs of their neediest students. Others have called it a political ploy for low-income, minority voters. Still other critics point to the logistics of giving parents "choices" when none exist: neither the private sector nor publically funded charters have shown the capacity and/or interest to absorb large numbers of students who have special needs or whose families are very poor.

A 2011 report by the Center on Education Policy reviewed a decade's worth of research on vouchers and found no clear positive impact on student achievement, despite the fact that much of this research has been conducted by research organizations with ties to the voucher movement. Little can be found in the last 12 years of "marketplace" reform that should give reformers confidence that vouchers can benefit education quality, equality, or the social good.

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