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## EDUCATION

**NEA Attacks Administration's Education Reform Plan**

By Nick Anderson

The nation's largest teachers union sharply attacked President Obama's most significant school improvement initiative on Friday evening, saying that it puts too much emphasis on a "narrow agenda" centered on charter schools and echoes the Bush administration's "top-down approach" to reform.

The National Education Association's criticism of Obama's \$4.35 billion ["Race to the Top" initiative](#) came nearly a month after the president [unveiled the competitive grant program](#), meant to spur states to move toward teacher performance pay; lift caps on independently operated, publicly funded charter schools; and take other steps to shake up school systems.

The NEA's statement to the Department of Education came a week before the end of the public-comment period on the administration's proposal, and it reflected deep divisions over the White House's education agenda within a constituency largely loyal to the Democratic Party.

The union, which boasts 3.2 million members, charged that Race to the Top contradicted administration pledges to give states more flexibility in how they improve schools. "We find this top-down approach disturbing; we have been down that road before with the failures of No Child Left Behind," [the union wrote in its comments](#), "and we cannot support yet another layer of federal mandates that have little or no research base of success and that usurp state and local government's responsibilities for public education."

It added: "Despite growing evidence to the contrary, it appears that the administration has decided that charter schools are the only answer to what ails America's public schools -- urban, suburban, exurban and rural -- and all must comply with that silver bullet."

An Education Department spokesman had no immediate comment. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said repeatedly he wants to work with unions and not foist reforms on teachers without consultation.

When Obama announced the initiative July 24, Dennis Van Roekel, president of the National Education Association, praised the administration's intentions to lift standards, raise teacher quality and turn around low-performing schools.

But he said performance pay, charter schools and links between student and teacher data raise difficult issues for his union.

That last issue prompted an NEA objection earlier this year, after Obama expressed his [desire to grade teachers](#) through the test scores of their students.

Van Roekel [told the New York Times](#) that his members were unhappy with such comments.

"When he equates teachers with test scores, that's when we part

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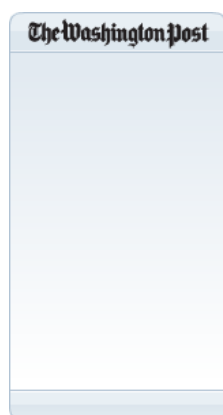
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"The standardized tests we administer to our students are only high-stakes for teachers, not for students. They're not held accountable to any of those results."

You've said it brother. It's not the teachers, but the students that should be graded on tests. Class track promotion should be based on test results. State colleges should waive tuition and fees for students that do well on tests. That way students will have an immediate incentive to learn.

That's by the way how most countries around the world do it. The US is again the exception.

Also, the pre-college curriculum should be standardized at the state level, if not nationally. The level of subject matter seen in most of the nations' schools is shamefully low and insufficient. Kids often don't get to see a text book until 5th grade. Around the world, text books are distributed starting with 1st grade.

Posted by: iubica2 | August 22, 2009 11:10 PM

The NEA opposes efforts to improve public education.  
Olbermann is a blowhard.  
Water is wet.  
Some things simply aren't news.

Posted by: mayoungkin | August 22, 2009 8:55 PM

To all of you NEA members that voted for Obama: I hope you are happy with what you voted for. Bush III. You were forewarned but refused to listen. Obama is as much a Democrat as my cat. Zero.

Posted by: bluescarf | August 22, 2009 7:08 PM

The NEA is right to lament top-down reform and its unintended consequences. Merit pay based on teacher performance sounds good, but insiders and local AP's can often "capture" such programs and use them to boost the salaries of favored teachers. As in many professions, beginning teachers are charged with educating the toughest kids, while veteran teachers are given better assignments such as AP courses. Clearly, those in the trenches will seem to be performing poorly while those with nicer assignments can wrap-up the "performance increase" very easily. Breaking the mold begins with federal deregulation. In fact, the inherent plug for Charter schools correctly assumes the pluses of programs that can escape the democratizing but dumbing down road-blocks that constrain and confound many public schools.

Posted by: socks2 | August 22, 2009 5:39 PM

As a staunch supporter of Pres. Obama, I too must part way on this issue. My

daughter is a middle school Life Science teacher, entering her 4th yr of teaching. Regretfully, like other teachers her age, she will start a new career path after this year. They are burning out because no matter how much they care about their students and strive to teach them well, they are blamed for the students who don't care to learn and the parents who could care less if their children are succeeding.

Tying teacher appraisals, pay raises, etc. to student success on these exams is back to the Bush education bust... No Child Left Behind.

Posted by: kat48 | August 22, 2009 4:35 PM

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The NEA has to begin looking to reform and reposition itself, from a paycheck oriented union, to a professional association. That said, we have to stop thinking that it education is solely the responsibility of the schools. There are issues of social justice and equality that are a huge factor in the so called "failing schools">

Posted by: senigma | August 22, 2009 3:58 PM

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I do think teachers should be measured according to the success rates of their students. I have had too many conversations w/ teachers who blame their students and parents for the teachers lack of success. Yet, if the kids do well, teachers proudly attribute that success to their own teaching abilities. The problem is a lack of teacher efficacy.

Teachers know when they are hired what challenges lie ahead at a particular school. Anybody can get student assessment scores, mobility rates, percentage of ESOL students etc. When teachers accept a position they are accepting responsibility for the success of the students at the particular instituion. If teachers are unable to achieve success in a particular school then they should leave or at the very least notify every parent whose child they cannot teach successfully. If you are unable to do what you have been hired to do, then you should step aside and let those who can teach all children, do it!

Another problem is that teachers don't think of students and taxpayers as their clients. They are indeed clients and teachers are hired to do a certain job with their clients. If they can't... they need to get out.

This same standard should be applied to charter schools who use taxpayer money, design many asinine programs, fail their students miserably for YEARS, then claim to be superior programs.

Teachers need to decide whether they are there to enable learning or if they just can't cut it, and are doing more harm to students than someone else might. Let teachers who are successful stay, all overs need to move into careers where they can experiencesuccess.

Posted by: 12345leavemealone | August 22, 2009 1:05 PM

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We should simply change the name of the NEA. Think about it "National" - no, no, teachers in many private and charter schools are not part of it. "Education" - no, NEA is much more a union than it is about education. "Association" - well, maybe - but local teachers seem to have very little control or input into NEA positions on the issues.

Why don't we just call it the "Fraternal Order of Teachers"?

Posted by: hill\_marty | August 22, 2009 12:34 PM

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Finally. I wondered if the NEA was going to sell out its membership or if it had had the nerve to stand up to Obama.

I am an Obama supporter but part ways on this one.

Charter Schools accept public money but do not have to adhere to the same stringent mandates that public schools are forced to follow. Therefore, if charter schools are so wonderful, accept public funding, but are excused from federal and state mandates, isn't that the formula we should embrace for local public education?

I do not support pay-for-performance, and that's why I originally supported

Hillary. I am an elementary art teacher. I do not test. I see kids once a week for 40 minutes. They don't even remember my name....it's "Hey, Art Teacher." I have kids who's parents tell them art "isn't important" and they don't hesitate to tell me how their parents feel.

I have a Principal who doesn't think art is important and cares more about what kind of shoes I wear than what I do.

So, as an bottom-of-the-food-chain art teacher, where do I fit into the Obama pay-for-performance plan? If I don't fit, then I want a refund on my college tuition because I was sold a lemon.

Obama does need to talk to teachers...and not just the NEA leadership. They haven't been in a classroom in decades. They need to talk to those of us who actually teach kids, have to tolerate the bureaucracy, maintain our professionalism while everyone denigrates us and tells us how stupid we are.

Arne Duncan has also stated that teachers should be allowed to bargain for PFP compensation schedules. That might be fine for Chicago, but I teach in Virginia, a right-to-work-state and proud of it! There is no collective bargaining for public employees. In my school district they even took away Meet and Confer and tried, and are still trying, to destroy the association (we are a quasi-union with no power).

I'm at least glad the NEA has publically denounced this plan. I might reconsider dropping my membership....nah!!!

Posted by: ilcn | August 22, 2009 11:22 AM

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The NEA is to education, what the UAW is to big three auto manufactures. One thing in common is they are both bankrupt.

Posted by: FredKnowsBest | August 22, 2009 8:28 AM

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Once again it is all about the almighty dollar. What happened to pride in doing one's work well?

Posted by: peep1935 | August 22, 2009 8:22 AM

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I voted for him. One of the reasons was that I hate republicans.

Come to find out that with respect to wars, economics, education and all the other "important" issues, They all look alike (an old southern expression, at one time only reserved for blacks).

Bush/Obama/Cheney, like ALL politicians, cut from the same mold !!!!

Posted by: flyersout | August 22, 2009 6:52 AM

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Looks like the stage is being set for another gigantic brouhaha among liberals. I thought when I first heard about the goals of Obama education reform that it must have been coordinated with the education unions before hand, because it clearly had major elements that are anathema to the teacher's unions.

Not so. Seems just plain ham fisted to me.

Posted by: Curmudgeon10 | August 22, 2009 6:10 AM

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tazmodious wrote: >>>I'm all for teacher accountability as long as there is also a push for student/parent accountability.

Oops! let me try that again.

One focus of Charter schools is on student and parent accountability. In some Charter schools parents and students sign a contract for expected behavior.

Posted by: angie12106 | August 22, 2009 4:31 AM

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tazI'm all for teacher accountability as long as there is also a push for student/parent accountability.

Posted by: angie12106 | August 22, 2009 4:27 AM

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Public schools don't choose their students - but private schools do.

And in MOST situations, public school teachers don't choose their students.  
imo - teacher merit pay based on student tests is only viable if the  
student's "learning gains" is higher than the previous year - rather than merit  
pay based on a test's pass or fail system.

Posted by: angie12106 | August 22, 2009 4:26 AM

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I'm all for teacher accountability as long as there is also a push for  
student/parent accountability.

Initially, there was not enough teacher accountability. As a teacher, I have  
come to accept that. No problem.

However, the pendulum has swung too far towards teacher accountability and  
away from student accountability. I see it more and more every year. It is  
always the teacher's fault that Johnny doesn't turn in his work.

More and more parents email or call asking what I'm going to do about their  
kid's missing work. Even though I have created a website that has all of the  
assignments in PDF format and all of the learning goals and assignments  
spelled out daily. Even though all of the grades and missing assignments are  
easily viewable on Infinite Campus from home, it is somehow my fault that  
Johnny is not getting his work done.

The more information and access you provide to the parents, the more some of  
them want. It's never enough for some.

Posted by: tazmodious | August 22, 2009 1:52 AM

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The NEA is absolutely intolerable. It MUST be abolished NOW! Education is  
simply too critical an issue. Shame on the politicians who pander to the NEA  
and grovel before it.

Posted by: zjr78xva | August 22, 2009 12:45 AM

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The standardized tests we administer to our students are only high-stakes for  
teachers, not for students. They're not held accountable to any of those results.

When students' advancement is more dependent on these tests, then I'll be  
more willing to "race to the top" alongside the students. Until then, I applaud  
the NEA's criticisms.

Posted by: EZE33 | August 21, 2009 11:37 PM

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onstrering - I'm not going to waste much energy trying to defend the NEA, but  
you can't really lay the "ebonics" flap on them. That was the Oakland school  
board trying to finagle some extra federal financing.

Posted by: bobsewell | August 21, 2009 10:56 PM

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NEA is opposed to a "top down" approach?  
Where do they think this money is coming from?

Federal programs aren't supposed to fund your school. If you want local  
control spend some money and work for local funding! You might even find  
out what local people want in exchange for their support.

And yes, fellow liberals, you're either going to have to nut up and go after a  
funding increase that supports local education or you're going to have to pay  
for a private school.

Posted by: JohnQuimby | August 21, 2009 10:42 PM

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The education industry has ruined our national education system over the last  
60 years.

If they are against it, I'm for it.

I support President Obama's efforts 100% and reject the ideas of those who support tenure.

Posted by: onestring | August 21, 2009 10:39 PM

Sharky- I'm all for getting rid of poor teachers. However, you seem to want to define good and poor teachers based solely on how their students do on a few standardized tests. Is that what you're saying?

Posted by: rjma1 | August 21, 2009 10:27 PM

Barack Obama: Change We Can Deceive In --A critique from the Left By Lori Price 19 Aug 2009 President Barack Obama is selling out the left wing of his party - those who contributed \$750 million to his campaign for 'change' - quicker than a Blue Cross rate rise in August. Mr. Obama won the Democratic nomination -- and the presidency -- on a wave of anti-Bush sentiment and the promise of 'change we can believe in.' But when the assertions and actions of the Obama Administration are critically examined, a conclusion can be drawn that the key difference -- thus far -- between Barack Obama and George W. Bush is their choice in breed of White House pet. 'Bipartisanship,' the bane of Obama's first eight months as president, is providing the groundwork for an extended (albeit educated, charming) Bush-light Administration. Those of us on the left are fearing a Bush-ultra Administration, wrapped in populist rhetoric, and disguised as everything but the same.

[http://www.legitgov.org/price\\_obama\\_change\\_deceive\\_in\\_190809.html](http://www.legitgov.org/price_obama_change_deceive_in_190809.html)

Posted by: lorifromclg | August 21, 2009 10:26 PM

""When he equates teachers with test scores, that's when we part company," Mr. Van Roekel told the Times."

This is exactly why the NEA is one of the single biggest obstacles standing in the way of real education reform. Why shouldn't teachers be held just as accountable as students for poor test scores? There are bad teachers just like there are bad students.

Posted by: SharkMan2 | August 21, 2009 10:18 PM

We at the NEA only support top down efforts that allow us to stifle innovation and improvement in our education system. We do not understand why our generous "contributions" have not resulted in the Federal Government imposing our wish list of policy proposals upon the States. If only the Federal Government would act more like California and do what we tell it to do.

Posted by: fallsmeadjc | August 21, 2009 10:10 PM

The NEA is the single worse thing that has ever happened to our system of education.

Like all unions, the NEA inspires mediocrity. Unions caused the US Auto industry to fail, and they have had the same effect on our schools.

Posted by: bluetalon | August 21, 2009 9:55 PM

One Nation Under God spends about \$465 billion a year on bullets and bombs and about \$60 billion on education. An F-35 is eighty-five million. My county has charter schools and there were many cases of misappropriating funds. There wasn't proper oversight and now my county has a mandatory drug testing program it can't afford. Socialism? It's illegal. How can you force innocent children to submit to a mandatory drug test to obtain a mandatory public education their parents are taxed to provide? Recently, news agencies announced American cash is stained with illegal drugs. This is another lawsuit coming to a school board near you like a runaway freight train. Also, requiring every graduating student to read a mandatory book, "Fighting For Freedom Isn't Free," is another lawsuit. Take Jesus and politics out of schools. Fund public education.

Posted by: rhyer | August 21, 2009 9:51 PM

Kill this evil, failure-perpetuating organization now while it is out in the open!

THESE are the people who are responsible for America's FAILED EDUCATION INDUSTRY.

If they oppose progress, we must oppose them.

Charter schools are one of the bright lights in American education.

They stand in stark contrast to the NEA... One of America's biggest blackholes of failure. They've promoted failed educational schemes like: Ebonics, Social Promotion, and Tenure for failed primary school, middle school, and high school teachers.

I SUPPORT PRESIDENT OBAMA'S EDUCATION POLICY 100%.

I reject the NEA out of hand.

You should, too.

Posted by: onestring | August 21, 2009 9:46 PM

Charter school on average do no better than public schools. They do tend to draw better students away from public schools and undercut teachers unions. Vouchers are even worse. It is just backdoor funding for the catholic church.

So if president Obama wants to use conservative principles as a reform for education he will get flack from teachers.

He is doing a great job overall but if he wants to use discredited conservative ideas then you have to expect sensible people will oppose it.

Posted by: John1263 | August 21, 2009 9:32 PM

When I see a comment like JakeD's whether from conservatives or liberals, the only word that comes to mind is "ignorance". What is a good idea and what really works and what's the evidence is the issue. That's what an educated and honest man would say. I'm a high school teacher, and before I was completely against Bush's policies, but from experience I see some of the merit, which I feel Obama sees. So what did I do, I honestly looked at my long held values and changed my mind. There are lazy teachers who milk the system and they should be held accountable and weeded out. But then I also see the other side, again due to experience and evidence. There are talented teachers who get weeded out before they can even begin because the private sector, meaning the textbook companies have such a stranglehold on what is used, which are the most boring texts, that it takes at least 5 years for a talented teacher to achieve his abilities, and alongside the poor training from many education schools, many great teachers leave.

My point is, there are so many ways to look at it critically, and it seems to me there are so many Jake D's who just jump on the bandwagon.

I saw Fox News the other day say "it's now HIS economy". And they said that over and over. I wonder how many Jake D's really start believing that.

Posted by: Playitagainsam | August 21, 2009 9:08 PM

WOO HOO!!! Keep it coming, libs : )

Posted by: JakeD | August 21, 2009 8:42 PM

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