

Who Are We?

Strong American Schools is a nonpartisan public awareness and action campaign aimed at elevating education to the top of the list of our nation's priorities through a vigorous and detailed discussion of the issue by the candidates for president in 2008.

This campaign is unique. It is funded by a substantial contribution from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, two of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world. Both foundations have for many years put education at the center of their work, making critical investments in public schools across the nation. This campaign seeks to unite Americans around the crucial mission of improving our public schools by raising the discussion to a national stage—and what better stage than a presidential election?

What Do We Want?

The issues currently being debated on the campaign trail—national security, the environment, and health care—share a core underpinning. Each relies on education. Without a highly educated citizenry, our nation's potential is limited, our competitiveness and security is undermined, and our ability to solve the most complex challenges of the day is severely threatened.

But it's more than that. It's a moral failing. Every child, regardless of race or income, has a right to attend a high quality school and strive for a better future. Right now in America, that is simply not the case for too many of our children. Seventy percent of eighth graders are not proficient in reading—and most will never catch up. Every year, more than 1 million students drop out of high school.

America is losing its competitive edge because we are not preparing workers for the 21st century economy. *All* students have a right to strong schools, but *everyone* will benefit from them.

To arrive at that destination, we need a serious discussion of how to get there. To begin, we urge candidates to address three common-sense priorities that hold tremendous promise for improving education:

- 1) American education standards.** Regardless of where they live, all students need to acquire knowledge and skills that prepare them for college, for the workplace, and for life. How can we make that happen?
- 2) Effective teachers in every classroom.** We need to enable teachers to improve their skills, measure teachers' performance in the classroom, and pay them more if they produce superior results or take on challenging assignments. How best do we accomplish this?
- 3) More time and support for learning.** We need to provide successful and struggling students alike more time for in-depth learning and greater personal attention. How can we give all students what they need to succeed?

Improving our schools will require Americans at all levels—state, local, and national, to work together. We are calling for the presidential candidates to give the attention and focus to this issue that the nation demands. Our nation can't afford to nibble at the margins when it comes to our kids. It's time for leadership.

How Will We Work?

Strong American Schools will engage presidential candidates from all parties on their own fields of play. Unlike other calls for education reform, this campaign will literally be played out where it matters most: on the snow-covered streets of Salem, New Hampshire, and among liberal and conservative activists in the blogosphere. We will use the full range of modern campaign tactics to keep the focus on education, including targeted field and grassroots efforts in primary states, a cutting-edge E-campaign, micro-targeting, and a national paid advertising strategy.