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Inadequate Yearly Progress: How the Bush Administration has Failed to Meet Its Own Standards for School Reform Two Years in a Row

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How the Bush Administration has failed to meet its own standards for school reform two years in a row.

In August of this year, *Broken Promises: The GOP Record on Education*, a report by the Democratic members of Committee on Education and the Workforce, chronicled the failure of the Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans to maintain their commitments on public education reform and funding. Unfortunately, over the past 3 months, the Bush Administration and the Congressional Republican leadership have shown no interest – indeed, in many ways they have backtracked – in keeping the promises they made to our nation’s schools, teachers, parents and their children. The Bush Budget, coupled with the Appropriations bills passed by the Republican Congress, show a blatant disregard to keeping the commitments to ensure a high quality education system in our country.

As a candidate, and when he entered the White House, George Bush promised that education would be a “top priority” of his Administration. He proposed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and promised to fully fund this historic law. But since the passage of NCLB with bipartisan support, the Bush Administration and Republican Congressional leaders have abandoned their pledge to provide state and local communities with the promised levels of support needed to implement its sweeping reforms. Even more troubling is the fact that the Bush Administration and the Republican Congress have focused substantial efforts on undermining the public school reform required by NCLB. This has been done by promoting misguided private school voucher schemes, abdicating responsibility to lawfully implement NCLB and allowing states to avoid accountability for the education of all students.

The Republicans’ failure to meet the needs of America’s students extends well beyond NCLB. Under the Bush-Republican budgets, students with disabilities, college aid, and Head Start programs have all been left behind. Republican proposals for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensure that full funding of this program will never be reached. If it were not for Democratic efforts, the Bush Administration changes to the calculation of student aid would have eliminated Pell grants for 84,000 low and middle-income individuals. The Bush Administration has also slashed thousands of volunteer positions utilized for community improvement under the AmeriCorps program. Lastly, the Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans have fought to dismantle Head Start at a time when our disadvantaged children need high quality preschool services more than ever.

The record is clear. The Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans have abandoned the promises they made to America’s children, students and families.

Students, Schools and Resources

This year, a record 53.7 million students will be enrolled in our nation's elementary and secondary schools. Severe state budget cuts are undermining the ability of states and local school districts to provide a quality education to all Americans. **Overcrowded and dilapidated schools, overburdened teachers, increased class sizes, inadequate support services like special education, and decreasing after-school and preschool opportunities are all direct consequences of shrinking state budgets.** States are being forced to reduce resources to local school districts, resulting in shorter school days and school years and massive layoffs of teachers. In short, schools across America are being forced to do more with less. Much more.

In a world of globalized competition, postsecondary education is more important than ever before in our nation's history. **But students and parents face double jeopardy as college costs rise and states dramatically reduce their support for higher education.** The prolonged recession has reduced charitable and alumni giving (contributing to sharp increases in tuition at colleges) and reduced scholarships, loans and grants. Students and their parents are being forced to shoulder an even greater share of the rising costs of attending college and hundreds of thousands are being denied admission to state universities and community colleges.

The federal government has historically stepped in when states have been unable to provide a quality education to their residents. However, President Bush and the Republicans in Congress are refusing to help states and schools in their desperate time of need. It's time for the President and Congress to keep their promises and fulfill their responsibilities by making education a *true* national priority.

Education Spending - Smallest Percentage Increase in Eight Years

Republicans make promises about accountability, but they repeatedly fail to provide the necessary resources. By contrast, Democrats strongly support accountability and investment in education. In order to have world-class schools, we must pair high standards for all students with targeted investments: to improve teacher training, to operate after-school centers, to help educate the children of military personnel. Unfortunately, Congressional Republicans have now voted to provide our nation's students with **the smallest amount of new investment in education in almost a decade.**

The Republican House education spending bill provides only a 4.8 percent increase for education – the smallest dollar increase in five years and the smallest percentage increase in eight years: less money at a time when we have higher expectations. By contrast, the average increase in education during the last four years of the Clinton Administration was 11 percent.

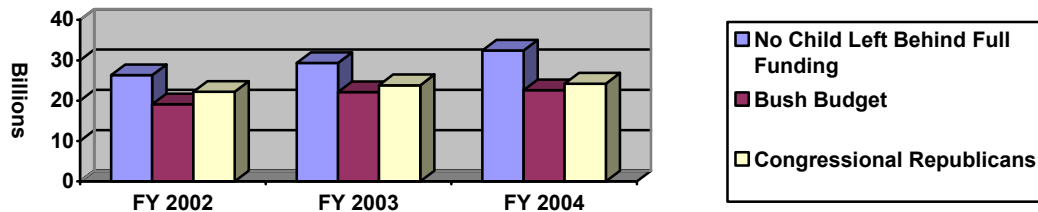
The Smallest Increase for Education in 8 Years

2004	+ \$2.5 billion	+ 4.8 %
2003	+ \$3.2 billion	+ 6.4 %
2002	+ \$6.7 billion	+ 16 %
----- Enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act -----		
2001	+ \$6.6 billion	+ 19 %
2000	+ \$2.1 billion	+ 6 %
1999	+ \$3.6 billion	+ 12 %
1998	+ \$3.3 billion	+ 12 %
1997	+ \$3.6 billion	+ 16 %

No Child Left Behind?

The 2004 Republican education spending bill underfunds the landmark, bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act by more than \$7.5 billion.

Republicans Shortchange Education Reform

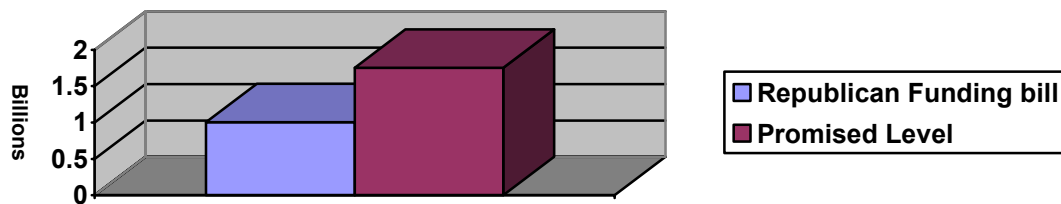


Democrats support the strong school reforms being carried out across our nation. In fact, NCLB is modeled after the reforms that Democrats spearheaded a decade ago. We also know that our public schools must have sufficient funds to implement those reforms. However, Republican-passed legislation abandons those promised resources, and the impact on students and teachers is devastating:

- **Title I.** More than half of all poor children eligible for additional intensive instruction in key academic subjects will go completely unserved because the Republican education funding bill falls about \$6 billion short. Title I is the main federal program that provides and targets funds to economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient children.
- **Teachers.** Over 50,000 teachers will not receive the high-quality professional development and training they were promised to better serve their students because the Republican bill cuts teacher training by nearly a quarter billion dollars, falling \$229 million short of the \$3.2 billion promised in 2002 to states for improving teacher quality.

- **After-School.** Over one million children will find their schoolhouse doors locked to their preschool, after-school and weekend programs because the Republican bill falls 43 percent short of the level promised in the No Child Left Behind Act. These programs help children improve their educational performance and drastically reduce exposure to high-risk behaviors that get kids into serious trouble.

Republicans Shortchange After-School Funding - One Million Fewer Children Served



- **Bilingual Education.** The Republican bill proposes first ever cut to bilingual education funding. Rather than provide much needed resources to help limited English proficient children learn English and academically succeed, the Republican bill actually cuts funding for bilingual education below the level provided last year.

Failed Implementation of NCLB by the Bush Administration

Unquestionably, money alone will not improve our schools. Instead of supplying schools, families and children with the tools and resources to make these reforms and standards a reality, the Bush Administration has failed to ensure proper and effective implementation of NCLB.

Instead of promoting implementation of the bipartisan NCLB, the Administration has been preoccupied with an extreme education agenda, such as private school vouchers. Like its record on funding, the Administration has come up short on implementation of this law and has broken its promise to America's disadvantaged children.

The Administration has failed to effectively implement NCLB in the following ways:

- **Favoring Private School Vouchers over Public School Reforms.** The Bush Administration has fought for private school vouchers for the District of Columbia, despite the opposition of the elected DC delegate and majorities of the City Council and School Board. In fact, private school vouchers for the District were never actually voted upon by the U.S. Senate. The time and energy spent funneling public

resources to private schools could have been better spent implementing NCLB's public school reforms.

- **Using public school reform funds to reward conservative political allies.** The Bush Administration has awarded millions of dollars intended to support public school reform to groups which advocate against public schools. These groups actively support Republican efforts to dismantle public education and enact private school vouchers.
- **Allowing Uncertified Teachers to be considered "Highly Qualified."** The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to ensure that all teachers are "highly qualified." By law, highly qualified teachers must have state certification. However, the Bush Administration has permitted uncertified teachers to be considered "highly qualified." This translates into some of our most disadvantaged children being taught by teachers without the proper experience and certification.
- **Favoring Bureaucracy over Improved Reading Programs.** One of the main reforms of NCLB was the Reading First program. This program is intended to help schools improve the reading skills of their most disadvantaged children through proven, research based methods. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration took nearly 2 years to award reading funds to many States. This delay in awarding funds caused thousands of children to lose the benefits of research based reading reforms.
- **Evisceration of Drop-Out Prevention Provisions.** Recently released Department of Education regulations allow schools to be viewed as making academic progress even as graduation rates for the lowest performing students decline. These regulations eliminate a central component of accountability and establish an incentive for schools to ignore high rates of student dropout.
- **Allowing Discrimination with Federal Funds and Denying Basic Civil Rights Protections for Children.** Under NCLB, federal education programs can directly fund religious organizations to provide certain educational services. However, the law specifically prohibits discrimination in hiring or in providing services based on race, color, religion, and sex (except as otherwise permitted under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972). Contrary to the plain language of the statute, however, the Department of Education proposes to permit organizations to discriminate on the basis of religion when hiring employees for positions paid for with federal funds. It also does nothing to ensure that all organizations, including supplemental service providers, funded by any program under the Act must follow all civil rights laws.
- **Confusing Guidance and Missed Deadlines.** The Bush Administration failed to provide guidance to schools on how to implement NCLB. Most regulations and guidance on this law came out after schools were required to implement its provisions. The Bush Administration has also issued contradictory guidance on many topics, including the testing of children with disabilities and public school choice.

These multiple policies and the failure to complete work in a timely manner have prevented schools from focusing on public school reforms designed to improve student learning.

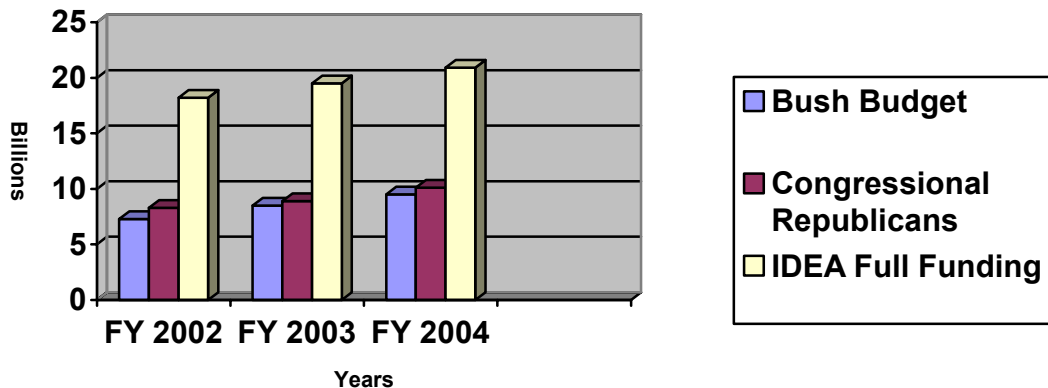
Reneging on Promises to Children With Disabilities

The Republican Appropriations bill severely shortchanges children with disabilities by providing \$1 billion less for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) than what was promised in the Republican Budget resolution and the reauthorization bill¹ passed by the House earlier this year. In addition, the Bush Administration has proposed paltry increases in IDEA funding for the last 2 years. At the Bush levels, IDEA will NEVER be fully funded.

For over a quarter century, the Congress has failed to deliver the level of funding it promised when IDEA was originally enacted. As a result, states and local communities have had to make up a shortfall of billions of dollars. Unfortunately, the Republican Congress and the Bush Administration are perpetuating this failure, which imposes additional challenges for already underfunded school districts.

Although dozens of Republicans sponsor bills, or vote for symbolic measures supporting full funding of IDEA, their actual commitment to special education funding has not matched their rhetoric. This year's Appropriations bill is no different. While the funding level in this bill is \$1 billion short of the level promised by the Republican budget resolution and the reauthorization bill, it is \$11 billion short of full funding. In order to live up to our decades old commitment to children with disabilities, the Republican FY 2004 Appropriations bill should provide \$21 billion for IDEA.

Bush Shortchanges Special Education



¹ H.R. 1350, 108th Congress

Promises Broken to Millions of College Students

As a candidate for president, George Bush promised to raise the maximum federal college scholarship, or Pell Grant, to as much as \$5,100 for each college freshman.

Yet during the Bush Presidency, we have never gotten close to that figure for any college student. The FY 2004 Republican Appropriations bill freezes the maximum Pell Grant at \$4,050 – the first time in a decade that the maximum award did not get an increase. This freeze occurs despite the declining buying power of the Pell Grant and the rising costs of attending college. In fact, today the projected average Pell Grant (\$2,415) is worth approximately \$50 less in real terms than the 1975-76 average grant.

Earlier this year, the Bush Administration made changes to our student aid programs that would have denied Pell Grants to 84,000 students and cut other key college aid to thousands of more students. Fortunately, a Democratic amendment to the 2004 Education Appropriations bill reverses the Bush student aid cuts, restoring Pell Grants and key college aid to thousands of students.

Still, rising college costs and Republican efforts to freeze or cut student aid have forced increasing numbers of students to take on high debt burdens to pay for college (\$17,000 on average), to work long hours that interfere with their academic success, or to forgo college altogether.

At a time of critical need in public schools, colleges and universities, House Republicans and President Bush are turning their backs on students and parents. In fact, in response to rising tuition, House Republicans have introduced a higher education bill that penalizes students. The Republican bill penalizes students by eliminating student access to key college aid such as work-study, Perkins loans, and Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants.

Rather than hurt students, House Democrats have introduced a bill, the *College Affordability and Accountability Act*, to make college tuition more affordable by ensuring that states maintain their support for higher education and providing incentives to schools to keep their tuition prices in check. Our bill will help – not hurt – students.

President Bush Breaks His Pledge on National Service

In his 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush pledged to expand the number of AmeriCorps service members to 75,000 in 2003. But, due to the mismanagement and accounting errors made by the executives in the Bush Administration who oversee AmeriCorps, the program has suffered a nearly 60 percent cut.

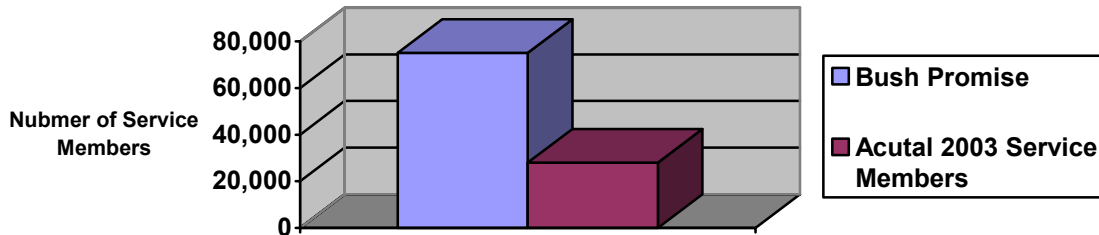
As a result, this year more than 20,000 Americans were denied the opportunity to serve their local communities and to meet critical education, public safety, homeland security, public health and environment needs. Service members, who run after-school programs,

build affordable housing and respond to disasters, were sharply reduced, causing a serious shortfall in many communities.

Under intense pressure from Democrats and the AmeriCorps community, negotiators on Capitol Hill have agreed to give the program \$444 million for fiscal year 2004. This increase in funds will allow AmeriCorps to grow, but it is unlikely that it will be enough for the President to meet his pledge to expand the program to 75,000 service members next year.

The crisis in AmeriCorps was caused by serious financial mismanagement by executives; but the penalty is being paid by thousands of AmeriCorps volunteers who will be denied the opportunity to serve, and the communities across America who desperately need their help.

Bush and House Republicans Devastate AmeriCorps



Dismantling Head Start

For four decades, Head Start has been one of the most successful, highly praised and carefully studied federal programs for children. President Ronald Reagan and Mrs. Nancy Reagan referred to Head Start as their personal “favorite” and protected Head Start from efforts in the 1980s to eliminate or de-fund federal social programs.

But despite promises of “compassionate conservatism,” President Bush and his Republican allies in Congress have embarked on an unprecedented effort to dismantle Head Start. Their bill, which passed the House by a single vote in July, will divert funds from local Head Start programs to state governments and bureaucracy. Under the Republican bill, states would be freed from the responsibility of meeting the federal quality and performance standards that have made Head Start so successful. The Republican bill allows larger class sizes, unproven academic curricula, minimal parental involvement, and few health and nutrition services. Dozens of child development experts, editorial boards, over one hundred national organizations, and tens of thousands of parents are opposing this dangerous initiative.

In fact, Republicans were only able to pass this disastrous Head Start bill by exempting the districts of some skeptical members. In a joint press release dated July 25, Kentucky

Representatives Fletcher, Lewis, Rogers and Whitfield boast that they had opposed the bill because of the demonstration block grant, but eventually supported it because they received a promise of an exemption from Republican Leadership and HHS for the state of Kentucky.

Instead of dismantling Head Start, as Republicans propose, we should be working to build on its success, making the program even stronger and helping it reach more eligible children. Providing Head Start's high quality comprehensive early education to all children from low-income families is important if they are to have an equal chance to achieve the American dream. Currently, only 6 in 10 eligible preschoolers receive Head Start because of inadequate funding. Children of migrant and seasonal farm workers are locked out of this important program to an even greater degree - with only 2 in 10 eligible children served by migrant and seasonal Head Start. Only 3 in 100 eligible infants and toddlers receive Early Head Start because of inadequate funding.

Yet, the President's budget does nothing to rectify this problem. The Bush budget's paltry increase just barely covers the cost of inflation, leaving behind 130,000 migrant and seasonal children and hundreds of thousands of other eligible preschoolers across the nation. Worse yet, the recent House-passed Republican Head Start bill sets authorization levels that would – for the first time in the history of the program – cut the number of children served by Head Start. Budgetary analyses of this Republican bill show that between 5,000 and 10,000 fewer children will be served by Head Start as a result of Republican policies and priorities. Despite the president's claim that we should help "every child enter school ready to learn," the Republican Head Start agenda has broken this promise in every possible manner.

Conclusion

Growing enrollments, shrinking state budgets and the stagnant economy have placed tremendous burdens on our elementary and secondary and postsecondary institutions. Yet the Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans have failed to live up to their promises to fund education. In fact, they are cutting back in key areas of education, while insisting that our nation's schools do more with less. These broken Republican promises have jeopardized the education of our children and therefore their future.