

## **Does School Diversity Appear in the Party Platforms?**

By Michael Hilton, PRRAC Law & Policy Fellow  
September 2012

Although the 2012 Democratic Platform calls for policies “[t]o enhance access and equity in employment, education, and business opportunities,” and the Republican Platform calls generally for expanded “school choice,” neither party platform mentions school diversity as a value or goal.

### Republican Party Platform

Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice famously stated in her convention speech that “we need to give parents greater choice – particularly poor parents whose kids – most often minorities — are trapped in failing neighborhood schools. This is the civil rights struggle of our day.” However, the Republican Party’s platform itself shies away from issues of racial and economic diversity, instead emphasizing a general theme of parent choice. The platform also emphasizes that “[p]arents are responsible for the education of their children” and calls for “accountability at every stage of schooling,” including “accountability on the part of administrators, parents and teachers.” The platform emphasizes local control of schools and curricula, and that “[e]ducation is more than schooling...not just knowledge and skills, but ethical and behavioral norms and traditions.” The platform supports an English first approach and family literacy programs for parents and children of low-income families, while opposing “divisive” programs for students, which they claim will limit opportunity in American society.

The Republican platform would replace teacher tenure systems with merit-based approaches, and believes “[a]ll personnel who interact with school children should pass background checks and be held to the highest standards of personal conduct.” The platform also supports ending social promotions, merit pay for teachers, greater classroom discipline, and strong top-down leadership from school boards, superintendents, and principals. The Republicans support “replacing ‘family planning’ programs for teens with abstinence education which teaches abstinence until marriage,” as well as “keeping federal funds from being used in mandatory or universal mental health, psychiatric, or socio- emotional screening programs.” The platform also calls for the use of block grants and the repeal of federal education regulations, and indicates that “federal money through Title I for low-income children and through IDEA for disabled youngsters should follow the students to whatever school they choose.” The platform states “[t]he federal government should not be in the business of originating student loans...it should serve as an insurance guarantor for the private sector.” Additionally, the

Republican platform calls for higher academic standards, including “rigorous assessments on the fundamentals, especially math, science, reading, history, and geography,” and places great emphasis on the STEM subjects and phonics.

Click [HERE](#) to see the full platform statement on education.

### Democratic Party Platform

The Democratic platform contains 1,017 words of text on education policy, but words like “segregation”, “diversity”, “racial isolation”, are not included (though elsewhere in the platform, the value of a diverse workforce is extolled). The platform does include a commitment to further efforts to “close the achievement gap in America’s schools” and “make sure America has the world’s highest proportion of college graduates by 2020.” The platform includes helping “states and territories develop comprehensive plans to raise standards and improve instruction in their early learning programs and invest[ing] in expanding and reforming Head Start.” Additionally, the platform includes expansion of the Promise Neighborhoods program.

The platform supports “raising standards for the programs that prepare our teachers, recognizing and rewarding good teaching, and retaining good teachers” as well as “evaluation systems that give struggling teachers a chance to succeed and protect due process if another teacher has to be put in the classroom.”

Democrats also “propose[] to double key investments in science to educate the next generation of scientists and engineers, encourage private sector innovation, and prepare at least 100,000 math and science teachers over the next decade.”

Click [HERE](#) to see the full platform statement on education.