What’s different about it?

BUSH’S PROPOSAL FOR EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The presidential campaign this year is unusual in that both Al Gore and George W. Bush are placing so much emphasis on improving education. Proposals from both candidates could significantly change the federal government’s role in education. This is one in a series of issue briefs intended to help people understand how each candidate’s major proposals differ from what the federal government already does in the field of education. To analyze these proposals, the Center on Education Policy drew from information on each candidate’s web site and from news reports as of June 15, 2000. These briefs are not meant to judge the merit of these proposals.

How does Bush’s accountability proposal differ from current federal actions?

George W. Bush has called for greater accountability in public education. Specifically, states that want to continue to receive federal education aid would have to adopt certain policies. Most of his ideas for accountability are already in federal laws, especially in the Title I program which was amended in 1994 based on recommendations from the Clinton Administration. (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides $8 billion a year in federal aid to support extra educational services for disadvantaged students.) That law already requires that states have academic standards, test students receiving services to see whether they are progressing toward those standards, and take action to improve failing schools or close them. Bush’s ideas differ from what is being done now in these ways:

1. State standards in science and history
   States would have to have academic standards in science and history, in addition to the mathematics and reading standards now required.

2. Annual tests for grades 3–8
   States would have to test their children more often—every grade from 3rd through 8th—instead of just three times in grades 3 through 12 as now required.

3. School choice and vouchers
   Failing schools would have to offer vouchers to parents to pay tuition at private schools or give parents the option to send their child to another public school. This would be in addition to current requirements to improve or close failing schools.

4. Reduce funding for failure to improve student achievement
   States that consistently fail to raise student achievement would lose the administrative funds that the federal government now provides to state departments of education. This is a new requirement.

5. School report cards
   States would have to issue school-by-school report cards, which is also a new requirement.

continued
What are some questions that can be asked about Bush’s proposal?

- Is it appropriate for the federal government to add testing time when many parents and policymakers are contending that students are already tested too much?

- Will these proposals increase federal control of education by expanding the academic standards that a state must have, increasing testing in grades 3 through 8, and requiring report cards?

- In other areas, such as gun control, Bush calls for better enforcement of current federal laws before new laws are enacted. Should the federal government better enforce the current accountability measures before new laws are enacted leading to vouchers for private schools and other controversial changes?

- What additional federal dollars is Bush going to provide to help schools raise student achievement as he demands more accountability?