What’s different about it?

GORE’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 Gore’s accountability proposal differ from current federal actions?

Al Gore has called for greater accountability from public education and proposes to use federal aid to secure that result. Gore acknowledges that the federal Title I program now contains an accountability system that can lead to better student achievement and better schools. (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. Gore’s ideas differ from what is being done now in these ways:

1. **Close failing schools**
   A school district would have to act more swiftly than the three years now allowed in Title I to close or fundamentally change a school that is failing.

2. **Public school choice**
   All students in failing schools would be able to participate in after-school programs through additional funding provided by the federal 21st Century Learning Community Centers program, or else they would be able to attend a better-performing public school of their choice in the school district.

3. **Reduce funding for failure to improve student achievement**
   States that consistently fail to raise their student achievement would lose the administrative funds the federal government now provides to state departments of education. These state administrative funds would be shifted to local efforts to improve schools. This is a new requirement.

4. **High school exit exams**
   States would receive financial rewards if they instituted a requirement for students to pass an exam in order to obtain a high school diploma. This would be a new federal initiative, and 27 states acting on their own have already put this requirement in place.

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5. **Raise compulsory school attendance age**
   States that raised the compulsory school attendance age to 18 would also receive financial rewards. Currently 12 states and the District of Columbia have this requirement, but 29 states end compulsory schooling at age 16, and 9 states end it at age 17.

**What are some questions that can be asked about Gore’s proposals?**

- Has the Clinton-Gore Administration moved fast enough to implement the current state accountability requirements in the Title I program?
- Should the federal government become involved in deciding the age of compulsory schooling, which to date has been a matter of state decision-making?
- Is there a need for federal encouragement when 27 states have already instituted requirements for high school exit examinations?
- What additional federal dollars is Gore going to provide to help schools raise student achievement as he demands more accountability?

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION,** contact John F. (Jack) Jennings, director, Center on Education Policy

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