



BARACK OBAMA: LIFETIME SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION IN PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico has nearly 4 million residents and 1 million students enrolled in school. The state of public education, and the general welfare, on the island is directly related to the economic development in Puerto Rico. Barack Obama's vision for the island includes ensuring that Puerto Rico has the tools necessary to continue economic development and to make a quality education available for every child. Obama believes that providing a high-quality education is key to addressing many of our country's challenges, and that world-class public schools provide the path to global opportunity, high-quality employment and strong local communities. While we have many good schools in America, we can still do a better job educating our children and replicating and scaling up successful programs so that they are the norm across the country as well as in Puerto Rico.

Today, more than ever, Puerto Rico's over 1,500 schools must prepare students not only to meet the demands of the global economy, but also to take their place as committed and engaged citizens. Barack Obama understands the unique language and cultural issues and that far too many students are attending crumbling schools. As president, Obama will work with Puerto Rico to equip struggling districts, both rural and urban, with the support and resources they need to provide disadvantaged students with an opportunity to reach their full potential.

Ensure Proper Management of Education Funds and Technical Assistance: Barack Obama believes that Congress and the U.S. Department of Education must work closely with the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) to reduce barriers to education for Puerto Rico's children. We must ensure that the PRDE is properly managing federal funds and has the capacity to administer these much-needed funds on the island. An Obama administration will take steps to provide the PRDE with the technical assistance and capacity necessary to ensure proper compliance with the requirements of federal law.

PRESCHOOL

Expand Early Childhood Education: Obama has been a champion of early childhood education since his years in the Illinois legislature, where he led the effort to create the Illinois Early Learning Council. Obama has introduced a comprehensive "Zero to Five" plan to provide critical supports to young children and their parents by investing \$10 billion per year to create: Early Learning Challenge Grants to stimulate and help fund "zero to five" efforts; quadruple the number of eligible children for Early Head Start and increase Head Start funding and improve quality for both; work to ensure all children have access to pre-school; provide affordable and high-quality child care that will promote child development and ease the burden on working families; and create a Presidential Early Learning Council to increase collaboration and program coordination across federal, state, and local levels. Obama will work with the PRDE to ensure that Puerto Rico has in place high-quality experts to coordinate, adapt, and administer early childhood programs in a manner that is effective and beneficial to the island.

ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOLS

Innovation to Improve Teacher Quality: From the moment children step into a classroom, the single most important factor in determining their achievement is their teacher. Barack Obama values teachers and the central role that they play in education. To ensure competent, effective teachers in schools that are organized for success, Obama's K-12 plan will expand service scholarships to underwrite high-quality preparation for teachers who commit to working in underserved districts, support ongoing improvements in teacher education, provide mentoring for beginning teachers, create incentives for shared planning and learning time for teachers, and support career pathways in participating districts that provide ongoing professional development and reward accomplished teachers for their expertise. The Obama Career Ladder initiative will help eliminate teacher shortages in hard-to-staff areas and subjects, improve teacher retention rates, strengthen teacher preparation programs, improve professional development, and better utilize and reward accomplished teachers.

Reform and Fund No Child Left Behind: The goal of the No Child Left Behind Act is the right one – ensuring that all children can meet high standards – but the law has significant flaws that need to be addressed. Barack Obama believes it was wrong to force teachers, principals and schools to accomplish the goals of No Child Left Behind without the necessary resources. We have failed to provide high-quality teachers in every classroom and failed to support and pay for those teachers. NCLB currently phases in Puerto Rico's full share of Title I funding over a five-year period. The law's Title I fix delivered over \$200 million in additional Title I funds to the island. Obama will work with the PRDE, local educational agencies, teachers' organizations and local leaders in Puerto Rico to ensure that NCLB reform addresses the need for a broader range of assessments and an accountability system that focuses on improving schools – including addressing infrastructure needs – rather than punishing them.

Fully Fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: There are thousands of special education children in Puerto Rico, a majority of which have not gotten the resources they need. Barack Obama understands the difficulties faced by families in Puerto Rico with children with special educational needs. These children deserve a quality education, and Obama is committed to forming a strong relationship between the U.S. Department of Education, the PRDE, and families and teachers to solve once and for all the decades-long challenges faced by children with special educational needs. Barack Obama has been a strong and consistent advocate for fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Congress promised to shoulder a percentage of each state's "excess cost" of educating children with disabilities, but it has never lived up to this obligation. Currently, the federal government provides less than half of the promised funding. Children are being shortchanged, and their parents are forced to fight with cash-strapped school districts to get the free and appropriate education the IDEA promises their children. Fully funding IDEA will provide students with disabilities in Puerto Rico the public education they have a right to, and school districts will be able to provide services without cutting into their general education budgets. In addition to fully funding IDEA, Obama will ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the Act.

Bilingual Education: Federal spending on bilingual education is stagnating while the number of students who lack English proficiency is growing rapidly. Federal spending on bilingual education should at least keep pace with the expanding need. Obama believes we should provide the instruction needed for Puerto Rico's children to learn English and build on their Spanish-language skills.

Give More High School Students Access to Rigorous College-Level Courses: Students who participate in Advanced Placement (AP) programs, which give students the opportunity to take college-level courses in high school, are much more likely to enroll and succeed in college. While enrollment in AP courses has nearly tripled over the past decade, many students attend schools that do not offer AP classes. Barack Obama, with Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC), introduced a bipartisan plan to allow students who do not have access to college-level courses at their high schools to apply for need-based grants and seek credit at local colleges or community colleges.

Expand High-Quality Afterschool Opportunities: Expanding access to high-quality afterschool programs will help children learn and strengthen a broad range of skills and provide relief to working parents who have to juggle child care and work responsibilities. Barack Obama will double funding for the main federal support for afterschool programs, the 21st Century Learning Centers program, to serve one million more children – including children in Puerto Rico. Obama will include measures to maximize performance and effectiveness across grantees nationwide.

Reduce the High School Dropout Rate: The drop-out rate in Puerto Rico is as high as 40 percent. Obama will address this problem by helping at-risk students before they get to high school, because the warning signs often occur well before high school. Obama will sign into law his “Success in the Middle Act,” which will provide federal support to improve the education of middle school students in low-performing schools by requiring states and the island of Puerto Rico to develop a detailed plan to improve student achievement, develop and utilize early identification data systems to identify those students most at-risk of dropping out and invest in proven strategies that reduce the number of drop outs. Obama will also establish a competitive grant process open to existing or proposed public/private partnerships or entities that are pursuing evidence-based models – such as Diploma Plus or Teacher Advisor programs – that have been proven to reduce dropouts and consult with teachers and local education officials to adapt these programs as necessary for Puerto Rico.

Support College Retention Programs: In recent years, student retention and graduation rates have seen a gradual decline in Puerto Rico’s universities. In order to reduce disparities in academic excellence in Puerto Rico’s universities, Barack Obama supports increasing efforts to help academic institutions properly determine their retention rates and work to understand the impact of university practices on college student retention and degree completion.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Simplify the Application Process for Financial Aid: The application process for financial aid is cumbersome and evidence shows it may be a reason why students never apply for college. Research has shown that the low take-up rate of the Pell Grant and HOPE and Lifetime Learning tax credit programs is likely due to the complexity of the application process. The current Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is 5 pages and 127 questions – making it longer and more involved than many federal tax returns. Not surprisingly, over 1.5 million high school students failed to apply for aid in 2004, despite being eligible for a Pell Grant. Barack Obama will simplify the financial aid process by eliminating the FAFSA and its complicated calculations altogether. Instead, aid would be based on a much simpler yet equally accurate formula, so that students can predict their eligibility well in advance. The aid process will be streamlined by enabling families to apply simply by checking a box on their tax form, authorizing their tax information to be used and eliminating the need for a separate application. For U.S. citizens who do not file federal income tax returns, Obama would establish streamlined application forms. Puerto Rican students could also apply for aid through the Puerto Rico tax return, which captures similar information as federal forms.

Expand Pell Grants for Low-Income Students: Many of Puerto Rico’s university students depend on Pell Grants to fund their education. Two decades ago, the maximum Pell Grant covered 55 percent of costs at a public four-year college, compared with only 32 percent today. The first bill Barack Obama introduced in the U.S. Senate would have helped make college more affordable for many students by increasing the maximum Pell Grant from the limit of \$4,050 to a new maximum of \$5,100. Obama has worked in a bipartisan way on the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee to achieve an increase in the Pell Grant to \$5,400 over the next few years. As president, Obama will continue to work to ensure that the maximum Pell Grant award is increased for low-income students, including Puerto Ricans. Specifically, he will ensure that the award keeps pace with the rising cost of college inflation.

Make College More Affordable: Barack Obama will make college affordable for all Americans and Puerto Ricans by creating a new American Opportunity Tax Credit. This fully refundable credit will ensure that the first \$4,000 of a college education is completely free for most students, and will cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university. And by making the tax credit fully refundable, Obama's credit will help low-income families that need it the most. Obama will also ensure that the tax credit is available to families at the time of enrollment by using prior year's tax data to deliver the credit at the time that tuition is due, rather than a year or more later when tax returns are filed. Recipients of this credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of community service a year, either during the school year or over the summer months. Barack Obama's college assistance programs will be available to Puerto Rican students just as in the rest of the country but will rely more on the existing Pell Grant distribution mechanism, delivering the funds directly through schools.

Create a Community College Partnership Program: Community colleges are a vital component of our higher education system. Without community colleges, millions of people would not be able to access the education and skills they need to further education or succeed in the workplace. Barack Obama will create a Community College Partnership Program to strengthen community colleges by providing grants to (a) conduct more thorough analysis of the types of skills and technical education that are in high demand from students and local industry; (b) implement new associate of arts degree programs that cater to emerging industry and technical career demands; and (c) reward those institutions that graduate more students and also increase their numbers of transfer students to four-year institutions. These efforts will ensure that community college students are able to directly use their skills in the workforce following graduation, and be prepared to continue their higher education. And the grants will support programs that facilitate transfers from two-year institutions to four-year institutions.