

## Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

### STORY

### **Obama, McCain Push Different Visions for Education Reform**

09/12/08

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/education\\_9-12.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/education_9-12.html)

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

**Student Worksheet** (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

### PROCEDURE

#### **1. WARM UP**

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

#### **2. MAIN ACTIVITY**

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

#### **3. DISCUSSION**

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

### INITIATING QUESTIONS

#### **1. Why is education important?**

#### **2. What do schools spend money on? How much do you think it costs to run a school?**

#### **3. What are some problems in your school that you think the government should help fix?**

### READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

#### **1. What is Barack Obama's vision for education?**

##### ANSWER

On September 10 he delivered a major education policy speech in the key election state of Ohio, calling for big increases in federal school spending and promising to replace ineffective teachers.

"We need a new vision for a 21st century education -- one where we aren't just supporting existing schools, but spurring innovation; where we're not just investing more money, but demanding more reform," Obama said.

#### **2. What do Obama and McCain want to do for teachers?**

##### ANSWER

Obama proposes rewarding effective teachers and teachers in underserved areas with salary incentives as well as recruiting new talented teachers, as does McCain.

Obama said he wants to train 30,000 highly qualified teachers a year, and expand mentoring programs matching new teachers with successful experienced teachers.

#### **3. What are school vouchers?**

##### ANSWER

The idea of choice is central to McCain's education policy, which contains fewer new ideas than Obama's policy platform. He supports vouchers, which would allow parents to use money they would have paid to

taxes for public education to pay for a private school education instead. Vouchers are controversial because they take money out of the public school system and give it to private schools, including religious schools.

#### **4. What are charter schools and how do Obama and McCain differ on their proposals for charter schools?**

##### **ANSWER**

They also support charter schools -- public schools that are free from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools. Charter schools are free to students, but often have a particular focus such as science, arts or business, and students have to apply or enter a lottery to be able to attend.

However McCain has lumped charter schools and private school vouchers together as two good options, while Obama is opposed to vouchers and instead has proposed increasing funding for charter schools from \$200 million a year to \$400 million.

#### **5. How do Obama and McCain differ on the issues of whether there is enough money spent on education?**

##### **ANSWER**

Another difference between McCain's and Obama's platforms is that McCain has suggested keeping spending at current, while Obama proposes spending \$19 billion in new education spending.

Much of that money would go to early education – before kids are 5 years old. Obama says it is important to reach children before they fall behind in school.

McCain's campaign argues there is enough money to fund increased achievement.

"There is not an organization in the nation that will argue that more money is all we need," McCain spokesperson Lisa Graham Keegan told the NewsHour. "We have literally quadrupled our expenditures per pupil since 1958 in real dollars."

Obama has said new spending in education (funded in part by raising taxes on families earning more than \$250,000) is necessary to fulfill the under-funded goals of No Child Left Behind and to provide teachers and students with the resources they need all the way through their education process.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

**1. How do the candidates' approaches to education differ?**

**2. Who do you agree with?**

**3. If you were running for president, what would you do about the nation's schools?**

**4. How might people's opinions about education differ depending on where they live, how old they are, how rich or poor they are?**

**5. Watch two recent campaign ads about education. How are the ads accurate or misleading?**

<http://www.factcheck.org/>

**6. Take a look at the New York Times issue guide on education**

<http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/issues/education.html> Are you surprised by the candidates' positions and words?

##### **Extension Activity**

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.