

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Obama Urges School Districts to Pay Teachers More and Open Charter Schools,

07/29/09

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec09/education_07-29.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. What is the stimulus bill?

2. What does reform mean? How might you reform your school district?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. What is the Obama administration offering to schools?

Schools districts across the country are about to get a lot of money under President Barack Obama's "Race to the Top" program, but only if they follow specific rules set out by Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

The Department of Education will distribute \$4.3 billion in grants to pay teachers based on how their students perform and to allow more charter schools, among other reforms.

2. What are the conditions to get the money?

Aside from the teacher pay, the program will also encourage school districts to allow more charter schools. Charter schools are more independent than traditional public schools.

3. Why are some of these reforms controversial?

California, New York and Wisconsin have laws against tying teacher pay to how their students perform in

class. Teacher unions, which are organizations with teacher members that use collective bargaining to get better pay and benefits, are also wary of teacher pay reform.

4. Where does the Race to the Top money come from?

Race to the Top is just a small part of the \$100 billion for education included in the stimulus bill. But the aim of the grant program is to push public schools to make changes in how they educate young people.

5. What will happen to school districts that don't make the changes?

Local officials who refuse to make the reforms that President Obama and Duncan want, could lose out on needed money.

6. What do some Republican critics say about the plan?

Republican critics argue that the program costs too much money and that there isn't enough accountability.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Do you think it is a good idea to push changes in schools by using money as leverage? Why or why not?

2. What do you think about these proposed changes? Do you think your teacher would be better at their job if they got paid more when you did well?

3. Why are some teachers against Obama's plan?

4. What would you want your school to do with the money if they got it?

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.