



## 1<sup>ST</sup> CLASS EDUCATION

*"Keep 65% in the Classroom for Kids & Teachers"*

### Executive Summary

Throughout America, there is a rising concern that public education is not fulfilling its mandate. While plans to increase overall education funding through additional taxes are numerous, actually impacting the classroom without tax increases is what the real goal should be. It's what the public wants, but the public hasn't been shown how it can be rationally and uniformly achieved...until now.

The average amount of each dollar spent on American education that actually makes it to the K-12 classroom is 61.7 cents. By moving more of the money already being spent on K-12 education to the classroom, literally hundreds of millions of dollars more per state could be spent directly on kids and teachers without raising overall expenditures or new taxes.

It's a simple, intuitive and responsible solution.

***Make public schools more effective and efficient by requiring at least 65% of every K-12 education dollar be spent on "in the classroom instruction" as defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics.***

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, four states have achieved the 65% goal without a specific percentage mandate. The top 5 states include: New York 68.3%; Maine 66.6%; Utah 65.2%; Tennessee 65.1%; and New Hampshire 64.9%. The NCEs reports show that the national average of classroom spending has dropped from 61.7% to 61.5% with three states that were above 65% dropping below that mark.

The National Center for Educational Statistics definition of "in the classroom spending," which seems to be adopted by the states, appears below. Generally, if the expenditure has to do with instruction of students in any form, from learning to read to learning to run a football pass pattern, it is counted as being an "in the classroom" expense.

#### "In the Classroom"

*Classroom Teachers, Personnel  
General Instruction Supplies  
Instructional Aides  
Activities -- Field Trip, Athletics, Music, Arts  
Tuition Paid to Out-of State Districts &  
Private Institutions for Special Needs Students*

#### "Outside the Classroom"

*Administration  
Plant Operations & Maintenance  
Food Services  
Transportation  
Instructional Support including Librarians,  
Teacher Training & Curriculum  
Student Support -- Nurses, Counselors*

For political reasons it is very helpful that athletics, arts, music, field trips and instruction and tuition for special needs students are all included in the NCEs "in the classroom spending" definition. This will deny the validity to the opponent's arguments of "Johnny won't be able to play football, Jane won't learn the violin, and Joe's special needs instruction won't be possible."

While evidence is decidedly mixed as to whether the amount of money spent per child is a determinant factor in test scores, the rationale for requiring more of current expenditures to be spent on instruction in the classroom is intuitive. After all, it is the activities in the classroom that bear directly on that individual child's educational outcome, not the plethora of school district superintendents and other bureaucratic staffing, nor the often inefficient ways schools cut their grass or paint their walls.

## The Specific Proposal for the 65% "In the Classroom" Requirement

This public policy goal should be enacted in such a way as to protect local control in education while demanding statewide accountability for the money being spent. This is important both from a philosophical public policy perspective and for the proposal's political viability.

This proposal calls for enacting in targeted states a requirement that:

1. Every school district in a State shall achieve a minimum of 65% of their budget being spent on "in the classroom" instruction using the Nation Center for Educational Statistics definitions.
2. School Districts that currently fall below the 65% goal shall be required to increase that percentage by a minimum of 2% a year until the 65% goal is met.
3. School Districts would be required to send their annual proposed budgets to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction verifying that the 65% goal or 2% annual improvement is being made.
4. School Districts that believe they cannot meet either the 65% goal or 2% annual improvement can petition for a one-year waiver from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, (or the highest elected state education official) along with their proposal of what can be achieved toward reaching the 65% goal.
5. The State Superintendent for Public Instruction shall have 30 days from a School District's petition to either deny or grant the one-year waiver or grant a partial one-year waiver short of the 65% goal or 2% annual increase.
6. The Legislature will be left with the opportunity to determine what punitive action may be taken if certain School Districts do not voluntarily comply with the requirements.

While each state may incorporate slightly different language, the principles of the 65% for "in the classroom instruction" goal, for having the statewide-elected education head as an arbitrator and for leaving the control of implementation ultimately up to the individual School Districts and Boards should be consistent. This consistency will be important in order to bring national prominence to this issue and the organizations supporting the campaign efforts for its enactment.

## The Electoral Goals of 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education

The plan calls for the creation of campaign committees to gather signatures for placement of the issue on the November 2006 ballot in possibly five locations: the District of Columbia, Arizona, Colorado, Michigan and Oklahoma. Three of these states (AZ, MI, OK) have first term Democratic Governors who will likely run for re-election. Colorado will have open governor's races because of term limits. Each face looming budgetary challenges which have created the potential for tax increase battles in their upcoming Legislative sessions.

According to the NECS, in each of these states the percentage of education dollars reaching the classroom is well below the national average of 81.5%, with each state below 60% of the education money reaching the classroom:

DC	49.3%
Arizona	58.6%
Colorado	57.9%
Michigan	57.4%
Oklahoma	57.8%

Each of these locations has an initiative process that is relatively inexpensive compared to other states and a limited number of large media outlets that make an earned media campaign possible.

The plan calls for the use of a national 501(c)(4) organization that will act as a support for the state campaign committees by consolidating certain activities where economies of scale can be achieved - general consulting,

professional signature gathering, research, media et cetera. This will create national visibility for the issue and help fund state activities through a coordinated fundraising effort with direct contributions to the state committees. Enactment of the plan needs to begin as soon as possible to ensure the greatest success.

### **The Political Benefits of 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education**

With the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education issue on the ballot, Republicans will have a viable answer to "in the classroom improvement of education" without the need to call for a tax increase, offsetting budget cuts in other popular programs or gimmick accounting and deficit spending. Other important but more tangential political advantages may occur because of the proposal, including:

1. **Splitting of the Education Union.** The 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education proposal naturally pits administrators and teachers at odds with one another with monies flowing from the former to the latter with its passage. Because most state education unions represent both administrators and teachers, the proposal will create tremendous tension within the organization. Every time the education establishment attacks this proposal, it hurts its standing with the public and the majority of its membership. Every day and every dollar the education establishment uses to defeat this proposal is a day and a dollar they cannot spend on other political activities.
2. **Direct Fix for Public Education.** While voucher and charter school proposals have great merit, large segments of the voting public – especially suburban, affluent women voters – view these ideas as an abandonment of public education. Women in particular want public education fixed, not replaced. Once additional fixing and funding of public education can be achieved via the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education proposal, targeted segments of voters may be more greatly predisposed to supporting voucher and charter school proposals, as Republicans address the voting public with greater credibility on public education issues.
3. **Establishes the Debate on Taxes and Government Spending.** By highlighting the inefficiencies of education spending, far and away the biggest budgetary item in every state, the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education initiative highlights the likely inefficiencies in all areas of state government. What's the percentage the Department of Motor Vehicles spends on administration verses direct service to the public?
4. **Allows the Use of Unlimited Non-Personal Money for Political Positioning Advantages.** The aforementioned benefits can be achieved with funding in any amount and from any source. In the era of campaign finance limitations on candidates, PACs and parties, galvanizing an electorate via the initiative process is a tremendous opportunity.
5. **It Wins!** As with initiatives proposing tax limits, term limits and the definition of marriage, ballot success for the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education proposal is exceedingly likely. Moreover, the proposal can galvanize public political discussion, becoming a natural litmus test for candidates with the electorate. Its intuitive simplicity establishes either a beneficiary relationship with the voters or a noted disconnect based on the candidates support or opposition to the proposal.

### **Conclusion: The 65% "In the Classroom" Reform Campaigns Can Create Tremendous Public Policy and Political Benefits**

The 65% "in the classroom" issue is the most intuitive way to make a significant difference for students, parents, teachers, taxpayers and the political leaders willing to take the cause as their own. As with term limits and the supermajority for tax increase reforms, the issue has the ability to bind together a coalition across party lines and political philosophies that make its passage at the ballot extremely likely.

The nexus of a voting bloc deeply concerned about the shortcomings of public education, the budgetary pressures states are facing, and the intuitive support for the 65% "in the classroom" idea gives the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Education initiatives an opportunity to fundamentally reform the priorities of public school spending that make up more than 50% of every state government's budget.

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