



A Union of Professionals

2008 U.S. Presidential Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Senator Joseph Biden

Date: June 18, 2007

Today, more than 46 million students attend our nation's public schools. The teachers, paraprofessionals and other school employees who work with these students each day care deeply about the quality of our public schools and the education their students receive.

1. What do you believe are the opportunities and challenges facing public education, and how would your administration deal with each?

Our school system was designed to meet the needs of an industrial and agricultural economy. It served us well. But the 21st century will be strongly influenced by the global economy. We need a system that will drive a knowledge-based, innovation-powered global economy – and that can keep up in a world where employers can get their talent from anywhere. Our challenge is to produce a generation that is equipped to constantly come up with new innovations BEFORE someone else figures out how to do it more cheaply. Our 21st century education system will be our ace in the hole.

My mother has an expression: “children tend to become that which you expect of them.” I want a country where we expect much from America's children. Every child must graduate from high school. Every qualified student should get a minimum of an associates' degree. We are far from there. Two-thirds of students entering high school graduate. About two-thirds of those go on to college. Half of those who go to college get a degree. So for every 100 ninth graders, just 18 earn a degree within 6 years of graduating high school. The gap between graduation and college attendance is widening between affluent and poor students instead of shrinking. These are our challenges. They are significant. But we can overcome them.

My vision is to set four goals to get us there: (1) start earlier by making preschool accessible for all; (2) put a well-paid, effective teacher in every classroom; (3) reduce class sizes; and (4) graduate every student from high school and help those that are qualified to go on to two or four years of college.

If there is one thing we know from research and experience, it is that a child who goes to preschool with books, structure, and activities, starts school better

prepared. She has a better shot of making it to middle school with grade-level reading and math skills, graduating high school, and going to college.

Studies have shown the results. Of kids from similar low income backgrounds who were enrolled in quality preschool 65 percent graduated from high school where just 45 percent of non-preschoolers did. In a recent study in Chicago kids who did not attend preschool were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.

The lesson here is that we need to increase our focus on the bookends of school: starting earlier and finishing strong. 12 years of education simply isn't adequate in a global economy.

That's why I support moving toward a 16 year public school system where every parent who wants to can send their child to pre-school and where every student goes on to at least two years of higher education.

I propose using the Federal government to help us along that path by doing three things immediately:

- (1) Fully funding Head Start so that we double the number of children it serves and quadruple the number of toddlers in Early Start.
- (2) Expanding help for middle class families paying for college by creating a refundable \$3,000 tax credit – which would cover the average tuition at public two-year colleges and cover more than half the average tuition at public four-year colleges.
- (3) Expanding Pell grants to \$5,100 next year (the maximum grant is \$4,310) and to \$6,300 in five years.

I also believe that we can improve the quality in our public schools by focusing our national education policy on two things: small classes and effective teachers. We can do that by: (1) retaining our teachers and (2) attracting good people to the profession.

My wife has taught for almost 30 years and as a part-time professor myself I know that teachers are the single most important factor in a child's education. But half of all new teachers leave the profession in 5 years. Teacher attrition costs our schools \$2 billion a year. For \$3 billion we could transform the way we prepare and support teachers as well as improve teacher pay by: (1) funding mentoring and induction programs for all new teachers so that we can better attract and retain those new to the profession, (2) creating a service scholarship program that would increase the supply of high quality teachers by providing them with scholarship money to defray the costs of education in exchange for a four-year commitment to teaching in a high need school, and (3) designing incentives to reward high quality and effective professional development like National Board Certification.

Other countries (Japan, Germany, Sweden, Finland) have made substantial investments in teachers in the last decade. Some fully subsidize graduate level teacher education or make teacher salaries competitive with engineers. I believe our goals should be to do the same.

2. What policies would you support to help close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students?

As I stated above in response to question 1, I strongly believe that investing in high-quality preschool and Head Start is essential to starting children off on equal footing – the gap already exists for some children by the time they enroll in kindergarten. In addition (as stated above), I support class size reduction, investments in teachers, investing in school modernization and incentives to attract and retain teachers in high-need schools. Finally, I have consistently supported fully funding Title I.

3. What is your view of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)? What changes, if any, would you make to the law and why? What provisions would you retain and why?

I supported No Child Left Behind because I believe that we need to make a substantial national investment in schools and that we need measures to determine which schools need help. But test scores – especially those from high-stakes, multiple choice tests – are not an accurate measure of student achievement. I support reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, but I believe the legislation needs important revisions.

The fact is that we are still leaving children behind because: No Child Left Behind has been under-funded by \$70 billion dollars, because teachers are forced to teach to the test and schools aren't given enough flexibility in evaluating students, and failing schools are penalized instead of helped.

To truly leave no child behind, I propose we do the following: Fully fund education; provide incentives for teachers to teach in low-performing schools; improve teacher pay; attract the brightest young minds to become teachers; invest in school infrastructure and building new schools.

We should revisit testing requirements to determine what the best measures for school performance are – instead of sticking with rigid requirements that stifle teacher creativity and force them to teach to the test. In Delaware, for example, student progress is assessed based on how much improvement students make over time (a growth model) – not just a score on a multiple choice test.

4. What role do you think early-childhood education should play in the overall approach to children’s education?

As I stated above in response to question 1, I believe high-quality early childhood education is absolutely essential to closing achievement gaps and preparing children for school. I support full funding for Head Start and Early Start as well as assistance to states for expanding early childhood education programs.

5. A growing number of students leave college with overwhelming debt from student loans. This burden, coupled with escalating tuition and fees, makes access to higher education increasingly difficult for many students and their families. What is the role of the federal government in ensuring that higher education is affordable and accessible?

In today’s competitive global economy, the value and importance of a highly educated workforce has never been clearer. The 35 percent increase in public four-year college tuition and fees over the last five years is higher than any other five-year increase since 1976. A college degree is fast becoming a luxury good - unmanageable for middle class families. Unless America changes course, it is estimated that over the next decade 2 million college-ready students are in danger of not attending college because they can’t afford it. I have introduced the College Affordability and Creating Chances for Education Success for Students (ACCESS) Act of 2007 to build upon my long record of supporting substantial tax incentives and grants to help all qualified students go to college.

My College ACCESS Act will make college affordable by: (1) helping middle class families cover the cost of tuition by creating a single \$3,000 refundable tax credit; (2) instilling the expectation that all students, no matter their income level, have the opportunity to attend college if they so choose by expanding grant assistance and tax benefits to low-income families; and (3) engaging students in the college preparation and planning process starting in the 8th grade.

My plan consolidates two existing tax incentives – the Hope Scholarship Credit and the tuition and fees deduction – and replaces them with a single \$3,000 refundable tax credit that is the equivalent of a \$12,000 deduction. This would simplify the existing higher education tax incentives and make it easier for families to understand and navigate the existing maze of incentives. The College ACCESS Tax Credit expands eligibility, and would be available for married couples making less than \$166,000. In addition, because the tax credit is a refundable, dollar-to-dollar match, it will provide substantial help to families and students that don’t pay taxes. Students eligible for Pell grant

assistance will be able to combine grants with this refundable credit to cover the average tuition costs at four-year public colleges.

I also propose increasing the maximum Pell Grant to \$5,100 immediately, followed by increases of \$300 per year for the next five years to \$6,300. When we put this program in place it practically covered the cost of college. It is a crucial support for many students.

In addition, I support beginning the conversation with students earlier about college. I have proposed an early Pell grants demonstration program. Currently, most students find out whether or not they will receive a Pell Grant during their senior year of high school. Starting the financial aid process earlier would allow families and students to plan ahead for college and develop an expectation that the future includes higher education. My plan provides funding for an Early Pell Grant Commitment Demonstration Program in four states, each of which would commit Pell Grants to two cohorts of up to 10,000 8th grade students, one in school year 2007-2008, and one in school year 2008-2009. Participation would be contingent on students' 8th grade eligibility for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program. Participants would qualify for the Automatic Zero Expected Family Contribution on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), guaranteeing them a maximum Pell Grant (\$4,310 for 2007-08).

6. What actions do you think the federal government should take to support the renovation and modernization of our nation's public school buildings?

I believe the federal government can also play an important role in helping states and school districts to address the growing need for school repair and construction. That is why I for several years I have cosponsored – and will continue to support -- initiatives that provide grants and subsidies for school improvement and modernization. Children should not be required to attend school in overcrowded, crumbling, or unsafe buildings, and if local resources are insufficient to meet these needs, the federal government should help to ease those burdens. I have long been committed to ensuring that every school is equipped with 21st century technology and advanced technology. I firmly believe that every school should be safe, clean and well kept.

7. What are your views on the privatizing and contracting out of public services, including private school vouchers?

I believe our first priority should be to fund our public schools, so I have repeatedly opposed proposals to provide publicly-funded vouchers and efforts to privatize essential public services. I believe that parents of kids in failing

schools need to be given flexibility to make sure that their children receive the education they need. I think they should be able to move their kids to a different public school or to a charter school. But we should not move money away from public schools because we are already underfunding our school system. That's why I spoke out and voted against President Bush's voucher plan he proposed for No Child Left Behind.

Healthcare is an issue that touches all of our lives. Today, *46 million Americans—including more than 8 million children—have no health insurance.* Increasingly, employers are less likely and less willing to provide healthcare coverage for their employees and retirees. Older Americans are paying a larger percentage of their income for healthcare than they did before Medicare was created. And healthcare workers are feeling increasingly overworked and insufficiently supported.

8. As president, what would you do to control skyrocketing healthcare costs while ensuring that all Americans—especially children and the elderly— have access to high-quality healthcare?

Everyone – adults and children – should have access to health care in this country. We are 9 million children and 37 million adults short of that goal. Seventy percent of those people are in families with one or more full time worker.

I will be announcing a more detailed health care plan of action in coming months. It will meet the following goals: (1) insuring every child, (2) assisting families and companies with the burdens of catastrophic cases; and (3) modernizing and simplifying our system.

The path toward universal coverage starts with the most vulnerable in our society. I would make sure that every child has health insurance – one way we can do this is by expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) – and I would relieve families and companies of the burden of catastrophic cases.

Beyond that, we should evaluate the best way to provide coverage for the remaining uninsured. Let me be clear – to me it is not a question of *if* we're going to provide universal health care – but *how* we're going to do it.

I would support experimentation on the state level (like in Massachusetts and California) to determine how employer mandates and individual mandates work best. And I would support states, like my home state of Delaware, that are making the transition to electronic medical record systems that allow doctors and patients real-time access to records and help prevent dangerous and costly mistakes.

Focusing on universal access to health care isn't enough. Our national health care policy must also include a strategy to keep sky-rocketing costs in check. We can do that by modernizing the system, simplifying it and improving quality. We can modernize health care by using electronic records and providing doctors, nurses and pharmacists with vital histories and information in real time. We can simplify health care by moving to one, universal claims form – some states have already done this and are reducing administrative costs. We can improve health care by taking the best medical practices and applying them to disease management. We must do a better job of promoting prevention and wellness and making sure that people who suffer from common chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes have adequate access to care, can afford medication and are able to manage and treat their illness and avoid serious complications.

9. Many licensed healthcare professionals, particularly RNs, are leaving hospital service because of difficult working conditions, including excessive and unsafe workloads, understaffing and mandatory overtime. What would you do to address these problems and to improve recruitment and retention of nurses and other healthcare professionals?

We are facing a critical shortage of nurses. According to a report released by the American Hospital Association, US hospitals need approximately 118,000 RNs to fill vacant positions nationwide. To attract and retain high-quality nurses, I support increasing funding for Title VIII programs, increasing funding for accelerated degree programs, and expanding funds available for nursing student loans, loan repayment, and scholarships. We also need to increase the supply of nurse faculty, which I propose to do by funding accelerated degree programs and doctoral programs and doubling funding for the Nurse Faculty Loan program. Finally, I support legislation that would help interested workers who have been laid off from other jobs get training to work in health care either as a nurse or in other specialty fields.

10. We've recently seen several initiatives designed to move health insurance coverage away from an employer-based model. Do you agree with that direction? If so, what would you propose as an alternative to the current system for covering working adults?

Approximately 175 million Americans receive health care coverage through their employers. This situation isn't likely to change overnight – and while we are working to improve the system and reduce costs we must continue to involve employers. Employers must continue to contribute to our health care system. A real plan to reform our health care system will require a role for

government, employer, and citizen. We have an opportunity to make some real foundational changes to the status quo, but it will require all of us to pitch in.

An administration's economic policy has far-reaching implications for the United States and the world. It also says a great deal about a president's priorities and general philosophy regarding how the federal government should relate to its citizens.

11. What are your priorities for the economy? How would your economic plan help restore funding for education, healthcare, transportation, public safety and many other services provided to our citizens?

To compete in a global economy we must invest in: health care, education (pre-school through college), critical infrastructure, energy security and technology and innovation.

To pay for investment in these areas we must end the war in Iraq which is costing \$100 billion or more a year and restore progressivity to the tax code.

The Bush tax cuts have disproportionately benefited the very wealthy. I don't believe that is the way to create good jobs or grow our economy. We can't make the investments we need and continue the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy. We should protect tax relief for the middle class. But I would roll back President Bush's tax cuts for those in the top 1% income bracket in America - those making over \$435,000 a year.

As President, I won't spend \$1 trillion dollars to repeal the estate tax for millionaire heirs like Paris Hilton. Instead, I would exempt estates up to \$7 million dollars and leave the tax in place for the remaining 7,000 or so estates that would have to pay it.

I would also roll back tax cuts on dividends and capital gains. In the 1990s, there was no lack of incentive to invest under the tax rates that were then in place. The current rates on capital gains and dividends were enacted as a short-term stimulus and then were extended. Allowing them to expire would not harm our economy.

Finally, we should eliminate tax loopholes. If someone owes taxes on investments, they should pay them. I would promote legislation that clarifies the definition of offshore tax shelters and imposes tougher requirements on U.S. taxpayers using secrecy definitions.

12. As president, what would you do to: (a) prevent employers from intimidating and harassing workers who support union representation, (b) ensure that workers are free to organize and bargain in the workplace and (c) protect the rights of American workers?

My administration would honor the importance of unions. The people I would appoint to the Department of Labor would understand and value labor. They wouldn't be afraid to use the word union.

I would make sure that the NLRB is a fair forum to contest unfair labor practices.

I would reverse the NLRB's decision broadening the definition of "supervisor." This is just a backhanded way to deny many workers their historic right to organize.

And I would enact the new protections in the Employee Free Choice Act, which I am proud to co-sponsor in the Senate.

13. What would your administration do to extend pension coverage to all employees and to guarantee that both private and public employees' hard-earned pensions are protected?

No one in this country should work their whole life only to end up with nothing. Retirement security requires three things: Social Security, pensions and personal savings, and affordable health care.

We must protect defined-benefit pensions and discourage movement to contribution plans. The best way we can do that is by protecting workers' negotiating power by vigilantly protecting the right to organize (as I discussed above in answer to question 12).

We should also insist on greater security for workers in the private sector who have pensions which are chronically underfunded. That's why I supported the Pension Reform Act last year that required greater company funding and strengthened the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation that was facing deficits exceeding \$23 billion.

We should make personal saving easier for workers who don't have pensions by requiring employers to contribute to 401k-type funds and allowing workers to carry with them the same retirement accounts from job to job.

One of the things that bothers me the most is that hard working people, America's middle class, are being left behind in pay and benefits – at a time when business is posting record profits. Business argues that wage increases have been slow because of retirement and health care costs – that's part of it but that's not the whole story here. When you have guys like the CEO of Home

Depot, getting \$210 million to take a hike you've got priorities that are just totally out of whack.

The two most important things we can do to balance power is to revitalize labor in giving employees a collective voice and to make sure that corporations are accountable to their shareholders and institutional investors.

Shareholders should have a voice in setting executive compensation and keeping them honest. I support allowing shareholders to vote on issues like executive compensation. Shareholders have a critical role to play in corporate accountability. That's why I would repeal the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act, which harmed investors' power to bring crooked executives to justice.

I'm proud to have worked on the most comprehensive corporate reform legislation in decades – the Sarbanes Oxley Act. We've been hearing a lot of grumbling from CEOs and the Chamber of Commerce that it is too strict – but let's evaluate what's happened since the law was enacted in 2002. Investors have better information, dozens of companies have restated their earnings to remedy accounting errors and crooked executives have been sent to jail – at the same time the stock market closed out 2006 with a record breaking year.

Critics argue that requiring CEOs to attest to the accuracy of a company's financial statements and the soundness of its internal controls is too distracting – but what could be more important to shareholders than the accuracy and integrity of a company's financial statements?

I haven't seen any evidence that we should roll back protections – a company that cannot or will not institute and maintain the internal controls necessary to meet the high standards of financial integrity and corporate accountability should not go public in the United States.

14. What is your strategy for sustaining and strengthening Social Security and Medicare?

We must make modest changes to Social Security and Medicare today in order to put them on sound footing for the future.

Medicare and Medicaid sustainability issues arise from rising health care costs, not expanded benefits – the same benefits just cost more. We are overpaying private Medicare insurers by \$10 billion a year. And private insurers charge more to begin with – we could save \$150 billion over 10 years if we just paid them what we pay regular Medicare recipients.

To contain costs we need to allow the federal government to negotiate prescription drug prices and modernize our system by switching to electronic record keeping and applying best practices to management of common chronic diseases like diabetes.

Social Security does not face an immediate crisis. With no changes, Social Security can pay full benefits through 2041. After that it can pay 74 percent of benefits. So let's end this talk of privatization and get real about changes that will put Social Security on sounder footing.

We need to bring Democrats and Republicans together – the way we did in 1983 when a bipartisan group of senior leaders from both parties put politics aside to fix Social Security. All the options should be on the table – including raising the cap on income subject to the Social Security tax (\$97,500 is the maximum for 2007).

Beyond that, we must protect defined-benefit pensions and discourage movement to contribution plans. We should insist on greater security for workers in the private sector who have pensions which are chronically underfunded. That's why I supported the Pension Reform Act last year that required greater company funding and strengthened the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation that was facing deficits exceeding \$23 billion.

Finally we should make personal saving easier for workers who don't have pensions by requiring employers to contribute to 401k-type funds and allowing workers to carry with them the same retirement accounts from job to job.

Labor unions have played and continue to play an important role in the social and economic health of our country. AFT members are interested in knowing your views on the role of labor unions.

15. As president, what would you do to remedy the National Labor Relations Board's October 2006 ruling in the *Kentucky River* cases that greatly expands the definition of "supervisor" and threatens to deny the right of workers to union protection and impede their ability to advocate for quality services without fear of reprisal?

I would reverse the NLRB's decision broadening the definition of "supervisor." It is just a backhanded way to deny many workers their historic right to organize.

16 What role do you think unions should play in shaping the economy? In government? In education? In healthcare?

When unions are at their strongest, the middle class is at its strongest and wages grow. When unions are on defense the middle class standard of living is stagnant.

I think we sometimes forget that labor built the middle class and that there isn't a white collar worker that is treated well by his employer or a piece of social legislation that exists that isn't because of organized labor. We have a strong middle class in this country because of labor.

My administration will honor and listen to the crucial voice of labor on all issues related to restoring the strength of the middle class – including education, health care, and the right to organize.

17. More than 8 million public employees in 25 states currently have no OSHA protection or entitlement to a safe and healthful workplace. Do you support universal OSHA coverage for all public employees?

We should guarantee American workers the safety they deserve. I believe that employees should be covered by regulations that ensure a safe working environment and their personal safety on the job. I have been a supporter of OSHA regulations since my early days in the Senate and time and time again I have voted to extend OSHA regulations and have vigorously opposed efforts to restrict the application of OSHA coverage.

18. It is the public policy of the federal government to encourage and promote collective bargaining through the National Labor Relations Act, as set forth in the act's preamble. Thirty-two states have policies that apply similar principles to their public employees. What would your administration do to guarantee these same rights to public employees in the other states?

I encourage states to recognize the right of public employees to organize and believe that states should protect collective bargaining.

In survey after survey, Americans identify the war in Iraq as one of the issues with which they are most concerned.

19. What is your proposal for dealing with the conflict in Iraq?

We all want to get our troops out of Iraq as soon as possible.

I've been leading the fight in Congress to repeal the 2002 use of force authorization, to limit the mission of troops in Iraq to defeating Al Qaeda and

training Iraqis, and to get most of our combat forces out early next year. I will push that relentlessly until Republicans stop supporting the President and start backing a responsible path out of Iraq.

But that's not enough.

First, we need a plan for what we leave behind, so we don't trade a dictator for chaos in Iraq and the Middle East. If that happens, we may have to send the next generation of Americans back to clean up the mess. Last year, I proposed a detailed plan to bring stability to Iraq. It would give the warring factions breathing room in regions, with control over the fabric of their daily lives: police, jobs, religion, education, marriage. A limited central government distributes oil revenues which are the glue that holds Iraq together. For more details, please go to my website, "www.planforiraq.com."

Second, as long as a single soldier is in Iraq, we must give him the best protection this country can provide. That's why I voted for the Supplemental bill two weeks ago. Without the money it provides, we won't be able to build and send to Iraq things like Mine Resistant vehicles that I have been fighting to fund. They offer 4 to 5 times the protection of a Humvee against roadside bombs, which are the biggest killers of Americans. It would be unconscionable not to get them into the field as soon as we possibly can.

In terms of the war on terror, our first priority must be to end the war in Iraq responsibly. That's the best way to restore the freedom, flexibility and credibility we need to meet other challenges around the world – starting with the struggle against radical fundamentalists who would use terror as a weapon.

Second, if we should be surging forces anywhere, it's Afghanistan. The Taliban is making a comeback, Al Qaeda is regrouping, the drug trade is booming but we can still prevail. The last thing we need is for Afghanistan to become again a haven for fundamentalists.

Third, we need to focus on the gravest threat to our security: the danger extremists will get their hands on WMD.

I've laid out in detail what I would do to secure loose weapons in the former Soviet Union, build the capacity of our partners to detect and disrupt terror networks and the transit of WMD, inspect all the cargo coming into this country and protect our chemical plants, trains and tunnels.

Fourth, we need to change our mindset. There is no purely military solution to these challenges. The best way to defeat a network of extremists with access to WMD is to build a network of our own – a network of like minded countries that pools resources, ideas, information, and power.

Finally, we need to recognize that the struggle with violent extremists is also a war of ideas. We have to regain the power of America's ideas and ideals and prove to people around the world that we offer hope while the extremists offer only hatred. If we do that, nothing can stop us.

In Conclusion

20. What do you think this nation's priorities should be during the next decade? How would your presidency advance those priorities?

George Bush and Dick Cheney have dug this country into a very deep hole abroad and here at home. The next President has no margin for error – no time for on-the-job training. It is time for honest leadership -- a President who is willing to be straight with the people.

We need a president who will keep his promise to this generation and the next: the promise to end this war in Iraq, the promise for a vibrant middle class with good jobs, health care and a secure retirement and the promise of a secure place for America in the world.

If I am elected I will keep these promises. I will end the war in Iraq and leave stability instead of chaos behind. I will invest in health care, retirement security, and education (see discussions above). I will work to stop climate change by limiting greenhouse gas emissions here at home, developing a national alternative energy policy to reduce our dependence on oil, and restoring the US role as an international leader in addressing global climate change. Then we can keep the most important promise: to pass on to our children a world and a community better than our own.