



WES CLARK'S PLAN TO PROMOTE SCHOOL EQUITY

Equal opportunity starts with better schools.

It has been fifty years since the landmark Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education, and students in America still are not learning in schools with equal resources. Instead of helping under-funded school districts meet their needs, President Bush has pursued tax cuts and economic policies that hurt working families and add to the states' fiscal crunch. States facing fiscal crises have cut funding for schools and forced school districts to make difficult cuts including: staff, after-school and athletic programs, and school renovation and modernization. In 2003, South Carolina reduced K-12 spending by \$400 per student, cutting spending to its lowest level since 1997. Rural districts, historically under-funded, have been particularly hard hit—both by inadequate funding and unwieldy one-size-fits-all federal policies. Instead of providing help, President Bush has burdened under resourced school districts with unfunded mandates and penalties. Wes Clark will work to ensure that all schools have equal resources.

Wes Clark's plan to tackle school equity is based on three simple principles:

- 1. Meeting Federal Commitment to Education*
- 2. Training and Retaining Good Teachers*
- 3. Building and Renovating Safe Schools*

MEETING FEDERAL COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

Wes Clark will follow through on the commitments we've made to our children. He believes that we need to fully fund the laws we pass, to ensure that states facing fiscal crises are not forced to make cuts in education funding. Wes Clark will:

- **Fully Fund No Child Left Behind.** The No Child Left Behind Act, as implemented by President Bush, has been a failure. It is wrong to impose a tremendous new mandate on states and local communities and then deprive them of the resources they need to succeed. The Bush Administration has focused too much on narrow tests and punishments, and too little on ensuring that every child can learn and succeed. Wes Clark would fully fund No Child Left Behind.
- **Work to fully fund Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.** The Federal government made a commitment to pay 40 percent of the cost of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). But the Federal government currently funds only 18 percent of special education. Since the inception of IDEA in 1975, the unfunded

federal portion has cost local schools and taxpayers over \$300 billion. Wes Clark would work to fully fund IDEA.

- **More flexibility for states and districts.** Wes Clark supports reforms that will give states and school districts greater freedom to target assistance to schools with the greatest needs.
- **Help relieve the state fiscal crises.** State and local governments are facing their worst fiscal crisis in decades, forcing states to make cuts in many programs—including education. Wes Clark will create a State and Local Tax Rebate Fund of \$20 billion per year (or \$40 billion total over the next two years) to alleviate this crisis. This fund would total \$570 million for South Carolina.
- **Support targeted assistance for rural schools.** Rural schools serve over 40 percent of our nation's students, but receive only 22 percent of federal education funding. Nearly 40 percent of South Carolina's schools are in rural areas – 41 percent of students in these schools are minorities. Rural schools and classes are big, computer use in the classroom relatively low, and many rural teachers do not feel that they are adequately supported. The No Child Left Behind Act promised rural schools the help they need to hire and retain qualified teachers, take advantage of new distance learning technology and other resources for students, and repair crumbling schools through the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP). But instead of benefiting from NCLB, rural schools have been targeted for cuts by the Bush administration. Wes Clark supports fully funding these programs in order to give small, rural schools flexibility in how they can use federal funds and to help these districts hire and retain talented teachers and fund professional development.

TRAINING AND RETAINING GOOD TEACHERS

Placing qualified teachers at the head of every classroom is a most important step in improving all schools. Studies indicate that students taught by highly qualified teachers in consecutive years perform substantially better on standardized achievement tests. But schools that need good teachers the most often pay them the least. The most severe teacher shortages are in underserved and low-performing schools – in high-poverty urban and rural school districts, which must hire 350,000 teachers over the next several years. Average teacher salaries in rural areas are a full 13.4 percent lower than in non-rural areas, and experienced rural teachers with masters' degrees receive about 17 percent less on average. In high poverty schools, one-third of students take math from teachers with neither a major nor a minor in mathematics. Substantial research shows that better teachers migrate from the most difficult schools. In urban districts, up to 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years. Wes Clark will:

- **Retain good teachers where they are needed most.** Wes Clark believes that to attract teachers to subjects and schools where their expertise is needed, we must pay teachers better. Teachers' salaries should be comparable not just to other professions but also to other districts. Too often more affluent districts are able to lure good teachers with high salaries. Wes Clark will target resources to districts that need help to increase teacher

salaries and provide incentives for teachers to teach in the most challenging schools and subject areas where there are shortages.

- **Support professional development and mentoring.** Wes Clark will provide qualifying school districts additional funding to increase teacher salaries and hire new teachers if they submit a plan that ensures teachers are qualified in their subject area and fosters professional development through increasing the number of teacher masters and developing mentoring of less experienced teachers.

BUILDING AND RENOVATING SAFE SCHOOLS

As our more than 90,000 public schools age, states and school districts are faced with the immense task of making all schools safe, comfortable, and compatible with the latest technology. According to a 2000 National Center for Education Statistics study, one in four schools reported having at least one type of onsite building in “less than adequate” condition. A much greater proportion, 76 percent, reported that schools require significant repairs, renovations, or modernization to bring schools up to par. Wes Clark will help school districts meet their construction needs. He will:

- **Invest in school construction.** Today rising property taxes and caps on local borrowing make it difficult, even impossible, for many communities to raise funds for school construction. Wes Clark supports the creation of State Infrastructure Banks (SIBs), modeled after successful approaches in community development, transportation and environmental quality, that would leverage local investment by creating new financing options, including credit enhancements and low-interest loans, that work for the neediest communities, and would encourage financial innovations so communities could get more mileage out of limited resources.
- **Support small rural schools.** The past few decades have seen a nationwide push for school consolidation, particularly in rural areas. Although the student population has grown by 70 percent since 1940, the number of schools has actually gone down by 70%. Research has shown, however, that small schools with only a few hundred students tend to have better attendance, lower drop-out rates, and higher academic achievement. To help small rural schools provide a rich and challenging education, Wes Clark will work to make distance learning equipment widely available and encourage inter-district as well as high school-community college cooperation to achieve this goal.