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Obama and McCain on Special Education

The intent of this article is to provide an unbiased look at the major presidential candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, and their respective positions and record on special education and education for children with disabilities.

In general, the information found below has been taken from the candidates' websites, their statements given at the AAPD Disability Forum this past August, and the United States Senate website for information on past votes in the Senate.

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was first passed, it required the federal government to fund 40% of the cost of special education services. Despite almost yearly efforts thereafter to fund this mandate, currently only about 17% of costs are covered by the federal government. This means that local districts and states must fund the high cost of special education. Without full funding, schools, and especially poorer or large urban school systems, are unable to provide adequate services to children.

Other issues which need to be addressed include failing schools, unqualified teachers in the classroom, transition and vocational programs, and providing adequate equipment and technology within our schools.

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Side-by-Side Positions on Education

issue	BARACK OBAMA	JOHN McCAIN
Full funding of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act at 40%, requiring the federal government to fund special education services	Supports[1]	Position is not clear. Voted No on an amendment in 2005 for full funding [S.Amdt. 2292 to H.R. 3010].[4] However, in answering a question at a New Hampshire forum, he stated not funding special education is a "disgrace."[5]
Fund Early Intervention and Head Start Programs	Supports[1]	Has repeatedly voted No on increasing funding for Head Start [S.Amdt. 2254 to H.R. 3010; S.Amdt. 1597 to H.R. 2660][4] but supports reforming Head Start.[3]
Universal Preschool	Supports[1]	Opposes, and would focus on coordinating programs to create high-level centers[3]
Fund Vocational Rehabilitation and Transition Programs	Supports[1]	Has not expressed a position

Barack Obama

"I don't want to send another generation of American children to failing schools. I don't want that future for my daughters. I don't want that future for your sons. I do not want that future for America."[1]

- Obama's comprehensive "Zero to Five" plan will provide critical support to young children and their parents. Unlike other early childhood education plans, Obama's plan places key emphasis at early care and education for infants, which is essential for children to be ready to enter kindergarten. Obama will quadruple Early Head Start, increase Head Start funding and improve quality for both.
- Fully Funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) at 40% as promised by the federal government.
- Obama will reform NCLB (No Child Left Behind), which starts by funding the law. Obama will also improve NCLB's accountability system so that we are supporting schools that need improvement, rather than punishing them.
- Obama will recruit math and science degree graduates to the teaching profession and will support efforts to help these teachers learn from professionals in the field.
- Obama will address the dropout crisis by passing his legislation to provide funding to school districts to invest in intervention strategies in middle school--strategies such as personal academic plans, teaching teams, parent involvement, mentoring, intensive reading and math instruction, and extended learning time.
- Support vocational rehabilitation education and college education for teenagers with disabilities.
- Obama will double funding for the main federal support for afterschool programs, the 21st Century Learning Centers program, to serve one million more children.

- **Education Issues Page:** http://www.barackobama.com/issues/education/
- **PreK-12 Plan:** http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/PreK-12EducationFactSheet.pdf
- **Higher Education Plan:** http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/CollegeAffordabilityFactSheet.pdf
- **Education Speech:** http://www.barackobama.com/2007/11/20/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_34.php
- **Disability Plan (contains information on special education):** http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/DisabilityPlanFactSheet.pdf

John McCain

"John McCain believes American education must be worthy of the promise we make to our children and ourselves. He understands that we are a nation committed to equal opportunity, and there is no equal opportunity without equal access to excellent education.

Public education should be defined as one in which our public support for a child's education follows that child into the school the parent chooses. The school is charged with the responsibility of educating the child, and must have the resources and management authority to deliver on that responsibility. They must also report to the parents and the public on their progress.

John McCain will place parents and children at the center of the education process, empowering parents by greatly expanding the ability of parents to choose among schools for their children. He believes all federal financial support must be predicated on providing parents the ability to move their children, and the dollars associated with them, from failing schools."[3]

- **Education Issue Page:** http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/19ce50b5-daa8-4795-b92d-92bd0d985bca.htm
- **Education Press Release:** http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/PressReleases/read.aspx?guid=2ca6f926-4564-4301-87cd-a5f35e68c0d4
- **Early Education Plan:** http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/read.aspx?guid=3883232c-bdeb-44e5-9387-22d1316e75ed
- **Higher Education Press Release:** http://www.johnmccain.com/informing/news/PressReleases/ed12978d-a54f-471e-aeed-65c65bcba6da.htm

[1] Barack Obama's website, www.barackobama.com
[2] AAPD National Forum Transcripts: http://www.aapd.com/News/election/080726forumtrans.htm
[3] John McCain's website, www.johnmccain.com
[4] http://www.senate.gov
[5] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtsVUgRZ0FY