

EDUCATION REFORM NOW

Democratic Platform Committee Meeting, Day 2 Part 7

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Disclaimer: This is an unofficial transcript of the DNC's meetings on July 8th and 9th based on video made available by C-SPAN. We think it's an accurate transcription but it's possible that the DNC may have recorded these proceedings differently. We created this document solely for the purposes of providing transparency and stimulating discussion.

Governor Dan Malloy (CT) opens session. Mayor Lee, San Francisco, introduces the education section.

(Mayor Lee) "As Congressman Cummings reminds us, our children are the living messages we send to a future we cannot see. So the question for us Democrats, as well as Americans, is whether we will prepare our children for a future that is strong, or one that is hopeless. The Democratic Party has been a force for education opportunity and equity for decades, and this year's platform reinvigorates that commitment. We believe in educational policies that support students and teachers, prepares our youth for the jobs of the twenty-first century, and encourages toddlers, youth and teens to fulfill their god given potential no matter what their zip code is."

AMENDMENT NUMBER 170, sponsored by Randi Weingartern, pg. 20, line 26. Add:

"Every student should be able to go to college debt-free and working families should not have to pay any tuition to go to public college and universities."

(Heather Gotne, VT) "It is hardly news that higher education has become increasingly difficult to access for more than three decades in this country. The causes are well known: escalating costs, stagnant incomes, and a shift away from federal grants to marketized student loans. This problem has long since reached crisis proportions for many people. Some are deterred from even considering a college education; those who do graduate are often saddled with crippling debt. Moreover, concerns about cost and debt often distort selections of programs of study and undermine completion. The neo-liberal fantasy that it is possible to do more with less has both driven and obscured the deeper source of this problem, which is the steady retreat from providing for the general welfare. Higher education enables all members of our society to realize their human capacities and should be viewed as a fundamental role of government positioned among its highest priorities. This amendment makes a powerful statement to the working people of America that higher education should be a right, not a privilege."

(Weingarten) "The point we are making here, by also moving it together, is what Senator Sanders and Secretary Clinton did this week as well. Which is that, everyone has been listening to Millennials. The amount of student debt is higher than any other debt in the nation. We say to students that they should have a right to go to college, but we create a debt sentence. And we say that there should be public institutions, and yet we don't invest in them. And so what this

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amendment does, which is why Senator Sanders called it a bold initiative, is this is Secretary Clinton's new college compact that says: 'Let's make sure students go to college debt-free and let's make sure there is free college for working families.' And I ask the body to do what Senator Sanders and Secretary Clinton did and approve this unanimously."

Unity Amendment, Unanimously Adopted

AMENDMENT NUMBER 140. Add:

"The federal government will push more colleges and universities to take quantifiable, affirmative steps in increasing the percentages of racial and ethnic minority students, low-income (Pell eligible) and first-generation students they enroll and graduate."

(Steven Benjamin, Mayor South Carolina) "We want to make sure we have expanded access to college education for people of all backgrounds, and make sure that all of our colleges and universities that are receiving funding are held accountable to making sure all of our kids are on the path to graduation."

Unanimously Adopted

AMENDMENT NUMBER 177, page 20, line 43. Add:

"To make progress toward these goals, the government should offer a moratorium on student loan payments to all federal loan borrowers so they have the time and get the resources they need to consolidate their loans, enroll in income based repayment programs, and take advantage of opportunities to reduce monthly payments and fees."

(Ce Cole Dillon, repayment expert on student loans) "This proposal is one of the proposals Secretary Clinton released in the package that Senator Sanders praised this week. The options available to help borrowers struggling with student debt are often confusing or unintelligible and sometimes borrowers are not even aware of them. This fits closely with Amendment #170 where we look prospectively to students that have not yet entered college and give the same grace to those that have. There are an estimated 40-47 million borrowers that have student debt. They owe a total of \$1.2 to 1.3 trillion dollars. This allows them to use their education to pay for their lives, and not just their student loans. This moratorium, in addition to giving borrowers a break on payments, will enable us to focus on the problem once and for all, and make sure borrowers have all of the resources and the help that they need."

The Ayes have it, unanimously.

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AMENDMENT NUMBER 145, page 21, line 5.

Minority serving institutions to be changed to “Historically Black Colleges and Universities and minority serving institutions”:

“These schools educate disproportionate of growing populations of Americans; students who are racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students and first generation students. As the nation is grappling with how to expand educational access and increase success, especially for students of color and low-income students and families, there is evidence that the nation’s HBCUs and minority serving institutions have honed promising models for educating these students to prepare them for growth, high and critical need positions, while containing costs.”

(Steven Benjamin, Mayor of Columbia, South Carolina) “We recognize that it’s imperative that we make the case for HBCUs and Minority Serving Institutions clearly in our platform. HBCUs, for example, graduate half of all African American teachers and Minority Serving Institutions are creating new ladders of opportunities all across our country. We make the case clearly in our platform so we give a sense of the important work these fantastic institutions are doing.”

The Ayes have it, unanimously.

AMENDMENT NUMBER 184, page 21, line 8. Add:

“We will provide further assistance to students at these schools, as well as other students across the country, by restoring year-round Pell funding so that low- and middle-income students from all backgrounds can get the support they need to make progress toward a college degree throughout the year.”

(Steven Benjamin, Mayor of Columbia, South Carolina) “Pell grants, of course have substantial support, probably universal support in this room. This program existed for a short time in the Obama Administration, was cut due to the budget pressures. Bringing it back to full funding is a worthy investment in our young people, in our future.”

The Ayes have it.

AMENDMENT NUMBER 76, sponsored by Chuck Pascal. Page 21, Line 39.

“We are also deeply committed to ensuring we that strike a better balance on testing, so that it informs, but does not drive, instruction. To that end, we encourage states to develop a multiple measures approach to assessment and we believed that standardized tests must meet American Statistical Association standards for reliability and validity. We oppose high-stakes standardized

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tests that falsely and unfairly label students of color, students with disabilities, and English Language learners as failing, the use of standardized test scores as basis for refusing to fund school or to close schools and the use of student test scores in teacher and principal evaluations, a practice which has been repeatedly rejected by researchers. We support enabling parents to opt their children out of standardized tests without penalty for either the student or the school.”

(Chuck Pascal) “This Amendment, the Draft Platform says we are committed to ensuring that we strike a better balance on testing so that it informs, but does not drive instruction. This amendment defines what that means. We should only be using standardized tests that are statistically valid. The current standardized testing, for the most part, only indicates that a student is in poverty. This says that before those tests are going to be used for any high stakes purpose, we have to make sure those tests are reliable and valid. That we oppose the toxic test and punish culture that allows these invalid test scores to be used to close schools, to punish schools, to defund schools, and to demonize teachers. We ask your support.

We ask that Randi Weingarten be allowed to speak on this amendment.”

(Weingarten) “The Democrats did a remarkable thing this year. In finding a way to get, even though they were the minority party in the Congress, to work with the President, work with parents, work with teachers around the country this year to reject No Child Left Behind, and to pass a new federal education law, ESSA. And what this law allows is what this amendment enables, too. Which is that schools become places of joy for children again. Where we engage kids and we care about their well-being. And so ESSA has said that testing should be about informing instruction, should be about diagnosis, should be about ensuring we know where kids are, should not be the be all and the end all. What this does is makes that more wholesome and we support it.”

Passes unanimously.

AMENDMENT NUMBER 77 sponsored by Chuck Pascal, page 22 line 12.

Part 1: Amend to read

“We will invest in high quality STEAM classes, community schools, computer science education, arts education, and expand linked learning models in career pathways. We will end the school-to-prison pipeline by opposing discipline policies which disproportionately affect students of color and students with disabilities and by supporting the use of restorative justice practices that help students and staff resolve conflicts peacefully and respectfully while helping to improve the teaching and learning environment, and we will work to improve school culture and combat bullying of all kinds.”

(Chuck Pascal) “We corrected, we changed the word STEM to STEAM in recognition that Arts are important, too. Of course, we support a well-rounded education that also includes social science and humanities. The amendment also, importantly, talks about discipline policies. In too many of our schools, we have seen that students of color, students with disabilities are disproportionately

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disciplined and disproportionality suspended. We have to have a greater recognition of this fact in order to combat that problem and in part of doing that is to use restorative discipline practices instead of punishment that actually gets students to reflect upon what they've done, to work together to solve problems, to solve conflict in the school. We would ask that we support that and encourage that on all levels and ask for support for the amendment.”

Second amendment (Troy LaRaviere, President of the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association):

Part 2: “The Democratic Party is committed to eliminating opportunity gaps, particularly those that lead students from low-income communities to arrive to school on day one of kindergarten several years behind their peers from higher income communities. That means advocating for labor and public assistance laws that ensure poor parents can spend time with their children. This means being committed to increasing the average income in households in poor communities. It means ensuring these children have health care, stable housing free of contaminants and a community free of violence, in order to minimize the likelihood of cognitive delays.

It means enriching early childhood programming that increases the likelihood that poor children will arrive to kindergarten with the foundations for meeting the expectations we have for them in the areas of literacy, numeracy, civic engagement and emotional intelligence.

It means we support what it takes to compel states to fund public education equitably and adequately, as well as expand support provided by the Title I formula for schools that serve a large number and high concentration of children in poverty. It means that we support ending curriculum gaps that maintain and exacerbate achievement gaps.

We're also committed to ensuring that schools who educate kids in poverty are not unfairly treated for taking on the challenge of serving those kids.

This means an end to the test and punish version of accountability that does no more than reveal the academic gaps created before they reach school.

We support policies that motivate our educators instead of demoralizing them. No school system in the world has ever achieved successful whole system reform by leading with punitive accountability. We must replace this strategy with one that will actually motivate and improve their training and professional development in order to get results for all students with an emphasis on equitable results for students of color, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.”

Passes Unanimously.

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AMENDMENT NUMBER 148 sponsored by Roberta Achtenberg, page 22 line 14

“We will encourage restorative justice and reform overly punitive disciplinary practices that disproportionately impact African Americans and Latinos, students with disabilities, and youth who identify as LGBT.”

-- also add Native American and Alaskan Native (friendly amendment)

(Achtenberg) “During the 2011-2012 about 3.5 million students were suspended, 260,000 were referred to law enforcement and 92,000 were arrested either in school or through school activities. Rather than improving the quality of our schools, overly punitive disciplinary practices make matters worse. They are associated with lower academic performance and higher rates of dropouts. They fuel mass incarceration epidemics, and most distressingly, these policies have a discriminatory bend toward affecting the school-to-prison pipeline and disproportionately affect African American and Latino students, students with disabilities, and youth who identify as LGBTQ. We need to change our approach to school discipline, and that’s why we are trying to enshrine in this document the calling out of restorative justice practices and other practices that work against this disproportionality.”

no opposition, it passes.

AMENDMENT NUMBER 65 sponsored by Chuck Pascal, page 22, line 16

Replace lines 16-21 with: “Democrats are also committed to providing high quality public school options and expanding these options for low-income youth. We support democratically governed great neighborhood public schools and high quality public charter schools, and we will help them disseminate best practices to other school leaders and educators. Democrats oppose for-profit charter schools focused on making a profit off of public resources. We believe that high-quality public charter schools should provide options for parents but should not replace or destabilize traditional public schools. Charter schools must reflect their communities, and thus must accept and retain proportionate numbers of students of color, students with disabilities and English language learners in relation to their neighborhood public schools. We support increased transparency and accountability for all charter schools.”

(Randi Weingarten) We started the education section with a unity amendment and we are ending the education section with a unity amendment. Because Democrats should be foursquare for high quality public schools for all children regardless of zip code, regardless of race, regardless of economic status. We have called for a commitment to democratically governed public schools We’ve said in this amendment that there’s a place for public charter schools, but we have also said we can’t have what is happening in Detroit right now where entities like the De Vos family and the Koch Brothers are trying to use charters to kill off public schools. We need to make sure that we level the playing field for all kids and ensure all kids have the right, the opportunity to learn and that all public schools are places where parents want to send their kids, where educators want to

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work, and most importantly, where children are engaged and have the opportunity to learn. That is why together we submit this new amendment.

(Jackie Lansdale) I'm a very proud and humble supporter of Hillary Rodham Clinton & I'm from Louisiana. I'm very proud and humble because this Democratic Party has not once, but twice made history. I'm very thankful to you for that. I think we are the smartest and most compassionate people on the planet. We believe in the quality/promise of public education from a child getting on a bus every day, to being transported safely, getting a quality lunch and coming home. There's the promise of public education, that's what we stand for. Charter schools do not honor that promise when they are for-profit. Their promise is to make sure the CEOs of those companies make money, their promise to assure that teachers have no due process, their promise is that those teachers are paid poorly, very poorly, at the expense of administration, their promise is not to children because they have a rotating, revolving door, which is very destabilizing. This is not the promise of public education.

(Chuck Pascal) Just to wind up here. This amendment talks about democratically governed public schools. We support schools being accountable to their communities, having an elected school board as opposed to an appointed board that is accountable to no one in the community. We also want to make it clear that while we understand that charters' original purpose was to be innovative and experimental and small, what we have now is not that, what we have is a dual system that is purporting to be equal, but in reality it is perpetuating segregation by race, a segregation by income, a segregation by opportunity. That has to stop. I want to thank Randi Weingarten for working with me over the last day to get these unity amendments and to get agreement on language to those of us in the education activist community to the unions and to the Clinton campaign, I want to thank Randi for that.

5 Opposed. It passes.