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Prominent Education Reformers Call for Longer School Days, Performance-Driven Teacher Pay, Expanded Public School Choice

Sharpton, Klein, Booker, Fenty, Romer: "Let go of outdated orthodoxies."

Last update: 12:00 p.m. EDT Aug. 24, 2008

DENVER, Aug 24, 2008 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- America's leading voices on education reform joined in Denver to call on Democratic leaders to steer public education in a new direction. On the eve of the Democratic National Convention, more than two dozen progressive elected officials, education reform advocates, school leaders and civil rights groups from across the country gathered at the Denver Art Museum to release the Ed Challenge for Change, which highlights new ideas for closing America's devastating achievement gap.

"An entrepreneurial explosion has occurred over the last few years in public education," said Joe Williams, Executive Director of Democrats for Education Reform, the organization responsible for conceiving the Ed Challenge for Change. "The creativity exhibited by this new group of educators is helping raise student achievement, empower teachers, close the minority learning gap, and bring hope to places where it's been in very short supply. It's a movement that we believe Sen. Obama and other Democrats have taken to heart, and we hope to see these reforms increase in schools across America during the Obama Administration."

Recognizing the "positive perfect storm" for education reform in America, participants, including Rev. Al Sharpton (Education Equality Project), Michelle Rhee (Chancellor, D.C. Public Schools) and Delia Pompa (National Council of La Raza), identified the following core principals and priorities for reforming federal education policies:

Universal access to quality early childhood education programs. We must make bold new investments in early education programs, which have been proven to make a critical difference in leveling the playing field for students in high-poverty areas.

Expanded charter school access. We should provide parents with meaningful public school choice for all students, while also making clear that choice comes with responsibility: parents must be partners in helping our young people become disciplined students and concerned citizens.

Improved accountability measures. In order to close the achievement gap, we must set high standards and demand accountability from not just teachers, but also students and parents, principals, education schools and researchers, and policymakers.

Extended school days and school years. Research has proven that more time in the classroom is essential to helping children who are falling behind to catch up and become proficient. We must make a commitment to providing extended school days and school years for students who need it and parents who choose it.

New teacher recruitment strategies. We must transform teaching into a profession that is competitive in compensation, continuously providing growth opportunities, and focused on accountability and producing results.

New funding allocation. In order to overcome the education deficits in our poorest districts, we must provide new pay incentives to attract the best teachers and principals to the lowest-performing schools, while also expanding access to high-quality pre-school, after school and summer programs.

A full list of participants is below. For more information on Democrats for Education Reform, including a full copy of the manifesto from Sunday's discussions, visit <http://edchallenge.wordpress.com/>.

Participants:

Joe Williams, Executive Director, Democrats For Education Reform
Joel Klein, Chancellor, New York City Schools
Adrian Fenty, Mayor, Washington D.C.
Cory Booker, Mayor, Newark
Federico Pena, Former Secretary of Energy
Roy Romer, Chairman, Strong American Schools, former Colorado governor
Rev. Al Sharpton, Education Equality Project
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor, D.C. Public Schools
Barbara O'Brien, Lt. Gov., Colorado
Peter Groff, President, Colorado State Senate
Jonathan Alter, Newsweek
Michael Bennet, Superintendent, Denver Public Schools
John Merrow, PBS
John King, Uncommon Schools
Diane Piche, Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights
Andrew Rotherham, Education Sector
Delia Pompa, National Council of La Raza
Amy Wilkins, Education Trust
Larry Rosenstock, High Tech High, San Diego
Jennifer Gonzales, Metro Organizations for People

Sponsored by:

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Sam and Nancy Gary
The Education Equality Project
Daniels Fund
Piron Foundation
Center for African American Policy at the University of Denver
New Schools Venture Fund
Education Reform Now
Education Trust
Ed in '08
Progressive Policy Institute
School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado
National Association of Charter School Authorizers
National Council of La Raza
Public Education & Business Coalition
Terry Minger, Gary-Williams Company
Massachusetts, 2020
Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
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Donnell-Kay Foundation
Colorado League of Charter Schools
A+ Denver
Colorado Children's Campaign
FICO National Network
Metro Organizations for People
Padres Unidos
Denver School of Science and Technology
The Odyssey School
GetSmart Schools
Denver Venture School
Center for Policy Entrepreneurship
Manual High School
West Denver Preparatory Charter
AXL Academy

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