

# Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club

## Platform on Education

Our children are our future.

The American public-school system is an important foundation of our democracy and our commitment to equality. The goal of a good education system is to enable students to become successful citizens and pursue a rewarding path into the economy. We believe all students, regardless of race, gender or class background, have a right to an excellent, free public education from pre-school through college. We also believe the public schools should be subject to public control.

Over the past half-century and continuing today, there has been a campaign to undermine public education. In California our educational system plummeted to near bottom in per pupil spending after Proposition 13. The consequent reduction in taxes, especially from the wealthy and corporate interests, combined with the redirection of existing tax revenues to building the one of the biggest prison systems in the world has created a “school to prison pipeline” especially for people of color and the poor, instead of a school to job pipeline.

Adversaries of public education have called for the replacement of “failing government schools” by “parent choice” through vouchers, charters, private education and support of the “business model” for education. The Department of Education is now headed by a proponent of this ideology, Betsy DeVos. The campaign against public education is misleadingly self-described as “educational reform” and those who support that campaign as “reformers.”

This effort to undercut public schools is being supported and funded by many of the wealthiest 1%, including such families as the Kochs, Waltons, Bloomborgs, Broads, Zuckerbergs, and Gates. They are anti-union and include entrepreneurs who profit from privatizing an essential public service.

Unfortunately, their tactics, which have resulted in many underfunded and unsafe public schools, have succeeded in convincing many in the community, including many poor and working people of all races, and many in the Democratic Party, to support their “reforms.”

These are among the tactics used in the campaign to undermine public education:

- Oppose taxes (especially of the wealthy) that fund our schools and then blame teachers and their unions for the failure of students to learn effectively.
- Use high stakes testing as virtually the sole criterion for evaluating both schools and teachers, leading to a narrowing of the curriculum, a stifling of critical thinking and creative and effective pedagogy, and “teaching to the test.” One of the most severe misuses of testing is using test scores as a criterion to close certain neighborhood schools.
- Create charter schools funded by public dollars but not accountable to the public. Unlike public schools, which are subject to democratic governance, charters are run by unelected and unaccountable individuals. Charter schools are often exempt from many legal protections that exist in public schools. In California, for instance, charters are exempt from legal requirements to provide due process to teachers and students, to comply with requests for information about how they operate and to comply with conflict of interest requirements.

- Implement vouchers, including vouchers that subsidize religious schools and other private schools.
- Spend vast sums of money, made available by many wealthy interests, to convince many parents who seek to have an alternative to the underfunded and struggling local public schools that their children will be better off if public funds are directed to private hands to control education.

Because of the unprecedented threat to public education, as outlined above, the Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club will endorse candidates and elected leaders if they support the following policies:

1. Increase state, as well as federal, resource allocations to our public schools. In California this means, at the very least, closure of the Proposition 13 corporate loopholes, if not repeal of the entire law, as well as adopting a fair taxation system which makes the wealthy pay their fair share. Make California #1 in the financial support for education again.
2. Challenge the transfer of public funds into private hands, which is the effect of the charter school (and voucher) movement.
3. Provide ample economic and social resources to those schools and school districts that are most in need. Give priority to the educational needs of communities of color, which have been subject to historical discriminatory practices, and communities of the poor and unemployed:
  - a. Do not close neighborhood schools that can be improved and whose closure will harm the communities served unless a greater harm to society outweighs the local harm.
  - b. Staff every classroom with a fully qualified teacher.
  - c. Support “wrap around” services (e.g. health services, counseling, community centers) being provided at school sites, especially in underserved communities.
  - d. Support public pre-schools, adult schools and colleges.
4. Expand democratic control over public schools:
  - a. Oppose any school charter that renders a school no longer subject to democratic, public governance.
  - b. Subject all charter schools to the same “sunshine” laws that govern all public institutions in California.
5. Ensure that students’ due process rights regarding discipline, suspension and expulsion are protected at charter schools.
6. Reduce or, if possible, eliminate private profiting from public education:
  - a. Enact laws to ensure that school board members, founders and administrators of charter schools do not have conflicts of interest (e.g. an economic share in a school; business relationships with publishing and technology companies).
  - b. Carefully scrutinize whether online/virtual education is the best educational alternative especially when proposed by those with vested interests.
7. Oppose business models of education:
  - a. Encourage collaborative educational efforts; move away from hierarchical and competitive models of education.

- b. Challenge the definition of “accountability” as measured by high stakes standardized testing.
  - c. Challenge models that provide those at the “top”(e.g. administrators/managers) with unjustifiably high salaries and benefits, while teachers and other staff are underpaid and deprived of adequate benefits.
8. Place teachers (and therefore students) at the center of education:
- a. Enable collaboration and on-going training and learning for teachers. Provide them with adequate resources and time to work together to develop curriculum and innovative, effective teaching methods. Ensure that they have all the resources they need to give attention to and educate every single student in their classes.
  - b. Make support and training of all new teachers a priority of our educational system. Give particular attention to providing special support and resources to teachers who take positions in under-privileged communities and communities of color.
  - c. Protect teachers’ rights to due process. Apply the California Education Code’s due process and seniority protections to charter schools.
  - d. Support teachers unions and other staff unions: Oppose the attacks on unions such as so-called "Right to Work" laws and legal cases.

The Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club will support only those political candidates and office holders who advocate the retention of democratically governed public education and the allocation of ample resources to our public schools. Those seeking Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club endorsement for public office will be asked whether or not they support, and what they will do to implement, the goals we have enumerated above.