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It is critical that all PTA members demonstrate their role as child advocates by becoming educated about candidates for public office and their positions on legislative issues that are important to children and public schools. In today's media climate, it is easy to be sidetracked from the things that are truly important in our leaders— their stance on the fundamental issues.

To help you make informed decisions about the presidential candidates of the two major political parties, PTA prepared this non-partisan comparison guide to better inform our membership of some key issues in the upcoming presidential election. PTA endorses no single political party, candidate, or platform, and will work with any administration to further our goal of advancing education and parental involvement. This guide is for informational purposes only, and should not be seen as endorsement by mention or exclusion of party or candidate.

The guide compares Republican presidential candidate John McCain, Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama and PTA's positions on issues of public education and child welfare.

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<b>Barack Obama (Directly from Campaign Website)</b>	<b>John McCain (Directly from Campaign Website)</b>	<b>PTA's Long Standing Positions (as updated in February 2008)</b>
<b>Parent Involvement</b>	<b>Parent Involvement</b>	<b>Parent Involvement</b>
<p>Barack Obama believes parents need to be meaningfully engaged in their children's education and work with schools to improve student achievement and school quality. In a collaborated effort with state leaders, Obama wants to create a meaningful parent report card that gives parents the concrete information they need to help improve their child's performance each year and plan for post-secondary education. Obama's plan would encourage schools and parents to establish a school-family contract laying out expectations for student attendance, behavior and homework. These contracts, written in the family's native language, would include information on tutoring, academic support, and public school choice options for students. Obama calls on parents to turn off the TV and video games, make sure their children are getting their homework done and work to take a greater stake in their child's education both in and outside of school.</p>	<p>John McCain believes we must empower parents with knowledge about their child's performance and give parents the ability to choose the school their child attends. He plans to provide parents with information needed to choose the best school for their child. Further, McCain believes parental involvement is critical to the success of any pre-K program. He supports educating parents on the basics of preparing their children for entering school, such as reading to their children as a primary way of expanding their child's vocabulary.</p>	<p>The federal government should provide parents multiple opportunities to be active participants in their child's education. Studies have documented that regardless of the economic, ethnic, or cultural background of the family, parent involvement in a child's education is a major factor in determining success in school. Though Congress cannot mandate parental engagement, the federal government should create a system of accountability designed to encourage parents to be active partners in their child's education, while ensuring local flexibility. Further, it is imperative that parents know immediately that their child's school is failing, the exact cause of the failure, what the state is doing about it, and the options available to parents and students – all in a very clear and understandable manner.</p>



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Barack Obama (Directly from Campaign Website)	John McCain (Directly from Campaign Website)	PTA's Long Standing Positions (as updated in February 2008)
<b>No Child Left Behind (NCLB)</b>	<b>No Child Left Behind (NCLB)</b>	<b>No Child Left Behind (NCLB)</b>
<p>Barack Obama supports NCLB's goal of ensuring that all children can meet high standards. However, he believes NCLB is under-funded, inadequately implemented, and has shortcomings in design which has limited its effectiveness and undercut its support. As a result, the law has failed to provide high-quality teachers in every classroom and failed to adequately support and pay those teachers.</p> <p>Obama seeks to improve student assessments that track student progress to measure readiness for college and the workplace, and improve student learning in a timely, individualized manner. He believes teachers should not be forced to spend time teaching students how to pass a standardized test, but rather spend more time teaching a challenging curriculum. Obama seeks to improve the accountability system so that schools deemed in need of improvement get support, rather than punishment.</p>	<p>John McCain believes that NCLB has provided a clearer picture of student and school achievements and failures. However, it's only the beginning of education reform. NCLB, according to McCain, should emphasize standards and accountability, but not focus on group averages. Every student should be inspired to reach his or her potential.</p> <p>McCain supports bringing resources to schools in need. However, he believes funds must be controlled by the leader who is held accountable, such as the school principal, and not by federal, state, or district bureaucrats.</p> <p>For McCain, giving parents greater choices in the school that their child attends is the best way to protect children against a failing bureaucracy. Parents should have more control over the money that follows their child. (See vouchers section).</p>	<p>PTA supports many provisions of NCLB, such as those that expand parent involvement policies, improve the targeting of resources to students and schools most in need, and increase the authorization of funds for NCLB programs. PTA is concerned that the law relies too heavily on testing as the primary measure of accountability without looking at other important indicators that help assess school performance, such as parent involvement, class size, instructional methods, equity of resources and physical infrastructure. Though Congress cannot mandate parent engagement, PTA believes that the government should provide multiple opportunities for parents to be active participants in their child's education. PTA's recommendations for the ESEA-NCLB reauthorization are built on four core principles: more accountability, better data through a more understandable and timely delivery system, better resources to help teachers and parents, and community support.</p>



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Barack Obama (Directly from Campaign Website)	John McCain (Directly from Campaign Website)	PTA's Long Standing Positions (as updated in February 2008)
<p><b>Teachers</b></p> <p>Obama would place emphasis on recruiting, preparing, retaining, and rewarding teachers. He would create new Teacher Service Scholarships that would cover undergraduate or graduate schools of education, in exchange for teaching at least four years in a high-need field or location.</p> <p>Obama would require all schools of education to be accredited. He plans to create teacher residency programs and a voluntary national performance assessment to supply 30,000 exceptionally well-prepared recruits to high-need schools.</p> <p>Obama supports merit pay based on a teacher's career, not solely on student achievement test scores. Obama plans on expanding mentoring programs that pair experienced teachers with new recruits. He would reward these veterans with more pay. He would create more financial incentives for teachers to improve their knowledge and skills for excellent teaching that increases student achievement, and for highly-qualified teachers who work at underserved schools and underserved subjects like math, science and special education.</p>	<p><b>Teachers</b></p> <p>McCain believes teacher quality is the most important aspect in turning around a failing school. To increase the amount of highly qualified and highly motivated teachers within our schools, McCain would devote five percent of Title II funding to states to recruit teachers who graduate in the top 25 percent of their class or who participate in an alternative teacher recruitment program such as Teach for America, the New York City Teaching Fellowship Program, the New Teacher Project, the American Board for Teacher Excellence, or excellent university initiatives.</p> <p>McCain is a proponent of merit pay, based on student achievement test scores. He would provide 60 percent of Title II funding as incentive bonuses for teachers who work in underperforming schools and raise student achievement in subject areas like math and science.</p> <p>McCain supports teacher professional development with a primary focus on instructional strategies that address the academic needs of their students. He would direct 35 percent of Title II funding to the school level so principals and teachers could focus these resources on the specific needs of their schools.</p>	<p><b>Teachers</b></p> <p>PTA supports programs and policies that promote the equitable distribution of high-quality teachers, and the recruitment and retention of talented and committed educators, with special emphasis placed on ensuring teacher diversity and addressing the special needs of rural and urban areas. PTA supports high standards for teacher preparation, licensing, hiring, and professional development for educators, particularly for beginning teachers to promote the achievement of all students and support a balanced accountability.</p>



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<p><b>Special Education</b></p> <p>Obama believes Congress has under-funded the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In his view, children are being shortchanged and as a result, their parents are forced to fight with cash-strapped school districts to get the promised free and appropriate education. Obama believes fully funding IDEA would provide students with disabilities the public education to which they are entitled. The federal government has committed itself to shouldering 40 percent of the cost to states, but now only pays 17 percent. In addition to fully funding IDEA, Obama would ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the Act.</p>	<p><b>Special Education</b></p> <p>McCain supports fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. He is a proponent of flexibility when measuring the progress of special education students.</p>	<p><b>Special Education</b></p> <p>PTA believes that all children can learn and that school-family collaboration is an important component of successful learning. PTA supports schools in their implementation of educational services that benefit the education of all children, including children with disabilities. Parents, teachers, and school administrators must work closely together to ensure that all children receive a quality public education. PTA firmly believes that only through such collaboration will all children be provided the opportunities needed to achieve their maximum potential.</p> <p>Furthermore, Congress should fulfill its obligation to pay 40 percent of the costs associated with complying with IDEA, per the commitment that Congress made in 1975 when the law was originally enacted.</p> <p>An increased federal investment in IDEA is necessary to ensure that states and schools can raise academic achievement and meet state and federal testing and accountability. Better collaboration between parents, teachers, school staff, and school administrators is needed to continue reforming and improving systems that provide education, early intervention, and transition services for children with disabilities. Parent and family involvement must always be a fundamental principle of IDEA.</p>



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<b>Barack Obama (Directly from Campaign Website)</b>	<b>John McCain (Directly from Campaign Website)</b>	<b>PTA's Long Standing Positions (as updated in February 2008)</b>
<b>School Choice/Vouchers</b>	<b>School Choice/Vouchers</b>	<b>School Choice/Vouchers</b>
<p>Obama would support effective programs and work to expand successful school choices for parents and students within the public education system. He would double funding for successful charter schools, increase charter school accountability, allow for interventions in struggling charter schools and would close chronically low-performing charter schools.</p> <p>Obama would create an Innovative Schools Fund so that states and school districts can promote and support successful public school types, including charters, nonprofit schools, Montessori schools, career academies and theme-focused schools.</p> <p>Obama feels that vouchers drain resources out of public schools and that there are not enough openings for every child to go into a parochial school or a private school.</p> <p>Fostering competition within the public school system would improve public education. Obama wants to make sure that kids who are in failing schools in local school districts have an option to go to schools that are doing well.</p>	<p>McCain has always been a proponent for school choice and believes that when a school is failing, parents should have the option to seek out education alternatives, and public support (vouchers) should follow that child into the school of the parent's choice. McCain believes it is the school's responsibility to report to the parents and the public on a student's progress.</p> <p>McCain believes competition from charter schools, private schools and home schooling has greatly improved public education, and parents should not be denied access to these alternatives. McCain wants to ensure that children who struggle to meet state standards have immediate access to high quality tutoring programs. McCain believes the voucher system would increase parent involvement in their child's education.</p>	<p>PTA supports educational choices within public schools and believes that parents should be involved in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of public school choice plans. PTA opposes any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system that diverts public funds to private or sectarian schools. PTA believes home schools and other nonpublic schools should meet the same educational standards as public schools.</p>



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Barack Obama (Directly from Campaign Website)	John McCain (Directly from Campaign Website)	PTA's Long Standing Positions (as updated in February 2008)
<p><b>High School (Drop-out/Achievement Gap)</b></p> <p>Because African American and Latino students are significantly less likely to graduate than white students, Obama would address the achievement gap by giving states \$200 million in grants to provide longer school days and additional learning time for students in need.</p> <p>He would introduce the "Success in the Middle Act," which would provide support to improve the education of middle grade students in low-performing schools, where the dropout problem begins. This initiative would also include parent involvement, personal academic plans, mentoring, and an early identification data system to identify those students most at-risk of dropping out.</p> <p>Obama would invest in competitive grants for evidence-based models to help students graduate, such as Diploma Plus or Teacher Advisor programs. He would support college outreach programs like GEAR UP, TRIO, and Upward Bound. Obama would expand summer learning opportunities that support disadvantaged children through partnerships between local school and community organizations. Obama would double funding for the 21st Century Learning Centers program, so that parents have access to high-quality afterschool programs.</p>	<p><b>High School (Drop-out/Achievement Gap)</b></p> <p>McCain states that "the worst problems of our public school system are often found in black communities," and he is committed to fixing the "civil rights challenges of our time." He believes school choice is critical in allowing parents, especially minority parents, access to high quality schools for their children. McCain believes the Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington, D.C. has resulted in dramatic benefits of giving parents control of money and choices.</p> <p>McCain believes that this program should be expanded to at least \$20 million benefiting nearly a thousand more families. McCain would also devote hundreds of millions of dollars for the expansion of virtual learning centers that offer students tutoring, advance placement programs, and SAT/ACT preparation courses. Low-income students would be eligible to receive up to \$4,000 to enroll in an online course.</p>	<p><b>High School (Drop-out/Achievement Gap)</b></p> <p>National PTA believes that every child must be provided with a well-rounded, high-quality education, which will ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and become productive members of society. Access to a free public education is the most effective method of securing this opportunity, and should not be denied to any child.</p> <p>National PTA especially recognizes the special needs of underserved populations including children with disabilities, limited English proficient children, homeless children, migrant children, gifted and talented children, and undocumented children in our nation's schools.</p> <p>To develop a stronger and more accountable system of education, schools must place priority on student performance and achievement. Schools must focus on what children know and are able to do and be held accountable for ensuring that all children succeed.</p> <p>Challenging and precise standards must be developed that objectively measure achievement in academic areas to enable students to achieve at the highest levels possible.</p>



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Barack Obama (Directly from Campaign Website)		PTA's Long Standing Positions (as updated in February 2008)
<b>High School (Drop-out/Achievement Gap) (cont.)</b>		<b>High School (Drop-out/Achievement Gap) (cont.)</b>
<p>Sponsoring the "Positive Behavior for Effective Schools Act," Obama would promote a system that sets common expectations of children in the classroom, not just for learning, but for the behaviors that support learning. This initiative would assist schools in shifting away from a zero tolerance model that forces children out of school to one that would address behavioral problems at the school, in partnership with families.</p>		<p>National PTA and its constituent bodies promote the establishment of, and support for existing educational programs, policies and procedures that:</p> <p>Provide equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of race, gender, national origin, language, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation.</p> <p>Place an increased emphasis on the teaching of science, mathematics, and technology to assure that all youth acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a global economy.</p> <p>Reduce the dropout rate.</p> <p>Increase access to high-quality, affordable after-school programs.</p>



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<p><b>English Language Learners</b></p> <p>Senator Obama has repeatedly stated his support of transitional, bilingual education and plans to fully fund English Language Learner (ELL) classes. In order to ensure that ELL students are on the path to graduation, he would support the creation of more appropriate assessments to keep schools accountable for tracking their progress.</p> <p>Obama also supports teaching English-speaking students second languages and the revitalization of American Indian languages. He believes that while ELL students should become fluent in English, all students should be learning a second language by emphasizing foreign language acquisition in schools.</p>	<p><b>English Language Learners</b></p> <p>While Senator McCain has not been particularly outspoken on ELL measures, he has highlighted the importance of meeting the needs of the growing number of U.S. students who are English-language learners. The main tenet of his policy agenda in this regard has been his expressed support for providing more flexible assessment standards for ELL students.</p>	<p><b>English Language Learners</b></p> <p>PTA supports federal programs that assist school districts in ensuring that limited English proficient (LEP) students meet the same high level of academic achievement that all students are expected to meet. PTA believes that parents have a right to be involved in all aspects of planning, implementing and evaluating language instructional programs, and that the allocation of funding for language instructional programs should be based on need.</p> <p>PTA does not support requirements that parents “opt in” for services, or the imposition of time limits on children’s access to language instructional program services. LEP students may have vastly different needs, and all children learn differently. Therefore, school districts should be allowed to tailor their language instructional programs to meet local needs.</p>



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<b>Global Workforce/Technology</b>	<b>Global Workforce/Technology</b>	<b>Global Workforce/Technology</b>
<p>Obama believes we are failing too many of our children by sending them into a 21st century economy with a 20th century education. He states our students are left out of the global market because they are not prepared for college. Few students major in fields such as engineering and mathematics, where the fastest growing occupations depend on a strong knowledge base in science and math. To address this area of concern, Obama would work with governors to ensure children have access to strong math and science curriculum. He would ensure that all students are trained to use technology to research, analyze and communicate in any scholastic major. His plan would recruit high-quality teachers in high-needs subject areas and develop assessments that measure inference, logic, data analysis, interpretation and communication.</p>	<p>McCain feels we are losing our lead over other industrialized nations because our students are not prepared with a first-rate education. Our high school students are scoring in the bottom half of all industrialized nations. McCain calls for the weeding out of incompetent teachers and plans to create virtual learning centers that offer students tutoring, advance placement programs, and SAT/ACT preparation courses.</p>	<p>Well-educated citizenry is essential to the success of our democracy. A large part of our economic strength depends on how well we serve our nation's school-aged children, 90 percent of whom are in our public schools. For our country to compete in the 21st century economy and for our children to thrive in an increasingly challenging world, our students need an excellent education. Our education system must teach high academic skills; personal responsibility; work ethic; embrace rapidly evolving technologies; and instill an enthusiasm for learning. It is critical that federal policies build public educators' capacity to prepare all children to thrive in an increasingly challenging world.</p>



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<p><b>Child Welfare, Child Protection</b></p> <p>Obama states his support for “proven effective means to combat the tragedy of child abuse.” In addition, Obama proposes expanding eligibility for Medicaid and State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).</p> <p>Obama’s “Zero to Five” early childhood education plan provides supports to young children and their parents by investing \$10 billion per year to create Early Learning Challenge Grants to fund state efforts; “quadruple the number of eligible children for Early Head Start” and increase Head Start funding; and provide “affordable and high-quality child care.”</p> <p>Obama would expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to increase the number of eligible working parents for this benefit and increase the benefits available to parents who support their children through child support payments. He would also increase the benefit for families with three or more children, whose families are most likely to be in poverty.</p> <p>Obama would expand the Nurse-Family Partnership program of home visitation to all low-income, first-time mothers.</p>	<p><b>Child Welfare, Child Protection</b></p> <p>McCain would promote adoption as a first option for women struggling with a crisis pregnancy. He would prohibit discrimination against families with adopted children, provide adoption education, and permit tax deductions for qualified adoption expenses, as well as remove barriers to interracial and inter-ethnic adoptions.</p> <p>McCain would protect children from Internet pornography and online predators, by requiring schools and libraries that receive federal subsidies for Internet connectivity to utilize technology to restrict access to sexually explicit material. McCain would require sex offenders to register on a national database, accessible by law enforcement to investigate crimes against children.</p>	<p><b>Child Welfare, Child Protection</b></p> <p>PTA supports policies that meet the special needs of children and families in poverty. In addition, PTA supports federal legislation that assists states in providing necessary public health and welfare services to children, youth, and families.</p> <p>PTA urges adequate funding at the local, state, and federal level for child abuse prevention and intervention programs, and the development and implementation, at all levels of comprehensive assault and sexual assault prevention programs for parents and children.</p> <p>PTA supports the acceptability of videotaped testimony in lieu of a child’s personal appearance in court and age-appropriate standards for questioning of child witnesses. Child protective services and the courts must work together to protect children while appropriate interventions are provided to counsel and rehabilitate the families of these children. Federal, state, local, and tribal agencies must cooperate across jurisdictional lines to ensure the protection and treatment of abused or neglected children and to ensure the apprehension and prosecution of child abusers.</p>



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Barack Obama (Directly from Campaign Website)		PTA's Long Standing Positions (as updated in February 2008)
<b>Child Welfare, Child Protection (cont.)</b>		<b>Child Welfare, Child Protection (cont.)</b>
<p>Under his new job training and workforce development programs, Obama would provide children in foster care with the skills necessary to compete.</p> <p>Obama would provide support for services to families affected by domestic violence and funding to develop best practices in domestic violence prevention.</p>		<p>PTA supports effective early education and development programs that are adequately funded and developmentally appropriate, and that coordinate comprehensive services for young children and their families. In addition, PTA believes that early childhood programs should incorporate strong family involvement components. PTA supports federal and state incentives for high-quality child-care and preschool programs that are affordable and accessible, coordinated at all levels (federal, state, and local), and characterized by high standards for teacher training, health, and safety.</p>

This document was prepared using the following resources:

- [http://www.publiceducation.org/FedUpdates/2008/Oct09\\_speci.html](http://www.publiceducation.org/FedUpdates/2008/Oct09_speci.html)
- <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/PressReleases/b9a7c28f-141c-4008-b724-debd2df51642.htm>
- <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/>
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