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Romney's Bold, Unprecedented Plan To Do Nothing About Education

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Just a few weeks back, Romney **unveiled** his plans for education reform:

While they were hailed as bold and unprecedented, Romney's plans are actually vague rehashings of a voucher system that has proven to be ineffective.

Using the typical rhetoric of failure and choice, Romney's education reforms mirror the conservatives' nationwide efforts to dismantle and privatize public education institutions. Evidence: Scott Walker's "reforms." **After attacking the unions' collective bargaining rights**, Walker made "unprecedented" cuts to education—about \$900 million—and constructed a byzantine state-run system of charter schools.

These sorts of reforms, however, have less to do with positive reformation, and more to do with shrinking government. Take a look, for instance, at a **report** from The Center for Education Reform. In the first two sentences, the article's author goes on the defensive:

Critics of opportunity scholarships say that they "drain money" from our public schools, that they don't have any impact on student achievement, that they're the product of a vast right-wing conspiracy, and even that they violate our cherished constitutional right...In reality, the truth is far less dramatic.

Okay, let's examine this drama-less "truth" through some reality goggles. First, let's see who your leading **donors are**: the Jaquelin Hume Foundation, whose mission is to promote "Reaganesque views," donated quite a bit—\$1.5 million. Just FYI, the Jaquelin Hume Foundation also funds the Goldwater Institute, the libertarian Institute for Justice and the Cato Institute. The Walton Family Foundation also made a significant donation—about \$5.9 million.

I don't believe in conspiracies, but I do believe the influence of ideology and money.

Romney said he would pursue "bold policy changes, dramatically expanding parental choice, making schools responsible for results by giving parents access to clear and instructive information, and attracting and rewarding our best teachers." That all very well and good. But those sorts of reforms do little in the way of positive reform.

Dr. Pedro Noguera, a professor at New York University and director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, [asks](#)

Why does Romney believe that simply by promoting school choice the problems that plague public education in America will go away? Perhaps Romney is not aware that choice and voucher systems have actually been around for a while, and in the cities that have adopted these policies, the challenges confronting American education have not gone away.

Romney, Noguera says, has probably latched onto the voucher system because the idea of choice appeals to many Americans: "We like the freedom to exercise our option, be it in selecting our brand of coffee, or the shows we watch." But, more than that, many have come to think that more choice and competition will force schools to improve or die, "get better or risk losing children and going out of business." But, what happens to choice when the information about school quality is opaque, difficult to understand or hard to find? What happens to choice when transportation is severely limited? These are all practical concerns that seriously undermine the central tenants of the voucher system.

Charter schools face even more problems that have proven difficult to deal with or nearly insurmountable. For one, a significant number of charter schools have found loopholes that allow them to under-enroll disadvantaged schools in order to boost their rankings. Also, vouchers (the physical things parents have to have to get their kids into better schools) don't necessarily guarantee access. In short, the voucher system does not guarantee freedom of information, mobility or choice for students and parents. What it does guarantee, according to a 2010 Parthenon study, is a greater concentration of disadvantaged students in failing schools.

So what are the other options? Reformers in Newark, N.J. have implemented the **Broader, Bolder Approach (BBA)**, which expanded early education programs, extended the school day, emphasized project-based learning, developed strong, strategic relationships between

communities, schools, businesses, universities, hospitals and local governments partnerships, and encouraged after-school programs.

Romney's reforms are hardly reforms at all: they are simplistic strategies that have more to do with "Reaganesque" ideology than education reform. We need a bold set of reforms that recognize the effects of poverty and prioritize serving disadvantaged children. Romney's plans are not bold, and they won't work.