

# Obama goes back to school

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On September 8, in what the Department of Education is touting as a "historic" speech, President Obama will be talking directly to students across the U.S., [live](#) on the White House website. But some parents and conservatives are [blasting](#) the president, calling the speech an excuse to brainwash American children.

Last month, in an [interview](#) with 11-year-old student reporter Damon Weaver, the president announced his big back-to-school plan:

*"I'm going to be making a big speech to young people all across the country about the importance of education; about the importance of staying in school; how we want to improve our education system and why it's so important for the country. So I hope everybody tunes in."*

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sent a [letter](#) to the nation's principals, inviting schools to watch the speech and included suggested classroom activities. But Jim Greer, the chairman of the Republican Party of Florida, came out swinging against the planned speech. An excerpt from his [statement](#):

*"The address scheduled for September 8, 2009, does not allow for healthy debate on the President's agenda, but rather obligates the youngest children in our public school system to agree with our President's initiatives or be ostracized by their teachers and classmates."*

[NBC](#) spoke with Katie Gordon, a spokeswoman for the Florida Republican Party, who said the party's "beef" is with the accompanying lesson plans. The [guide](#) for pre-K through grade 6 suggests questions students think about during the speech, such as "What is the President trying to tell me? What is the President asking me to do?"

The [plan](#) for grades 7-12 includes a "guided discussion," with suggested topics: "What resonated with you from President Obama's speech? What is President Obama inspiring you to do?"

The Cato Institute, a public-policy research foundation, issued a [press release](#) entitled "Hey Obama, Leave Those Kids Alone," criticizing the "troubling buzzwords" in the lesson plans:

*"It's one thing for a president to encourage all kids to work hard and stay in school – that's a reasonable use of the bully pulpit. It's another thing entirely, however, to have the U.S. Department of Education send detailed instructions to public schools nationwide on how to glorify the president and the presidency, and push them to drive social change."*

Across the blogosphere, comments covered the spectrum, from critical to supportive, and from one

student, a little anger:

"I sent my children to school to be educated NOT indoctrinated." — [justamom](#)

"The fact that people want to keep their kids from hearing the President of the United States encourage them to do well in school shows a true level of ignorance." — [Firefey](#)

"As an [sic] 9th grade student, I'd like to say that 1. I'm not sure why everyone is so scared that we'll all be brainwashed by the President ... 2. My school is one that is not allowing us to watch the speech, and quite frankly, I'm pissed." — [Willbw](#)

Both Presidents George Bush and Ronald Reagan gave nationally televised speeches aimed specifically at students. In 1989, Bush delivered a [televised](#) anti-drug speech, and Reagan's 1986 [commencement speech](#) and Q&A session was "beamed over public television into 171 school districts," according to the L.A. Times.

It's worth noting that schools are, encouraged, not required, to air the speech. The [Houston Chronicle](#) reports that one Dallas school district is leaving the decision to individual teachers. Susan Dacus, spokeswoman for the Wylie school district, says parents who don't want their children to see it can opt out.

In an ironic twist, one Missouri school won't be airing the speech because of a lack of funding. Michelle Baumstark, spokeswoman for Columbia public schools, told the [Columbia Daily Tribune](#), "We don't have the funding or the equipment to support that type of broadcasting."

— Lili Ladaga

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