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Voter Guide 2012 Fact Sheet: Education

What is the federal role in education?

- The federal government funds a multitude of education programs, from Pell grants and Stafford loans for college students to early-childhood education in Head Start to the Title I program for disadvantaged public schools.

What Americans Say:

“I would absolutely not be able to go to college if I didn’t receive federal aid.”

– Laura (Stafford, Virginia)

Key Facts

- **Funding:** Education amounts to around **two percent of total federal spending** – and that has held roughly constant for decades.
- **Challenges in Education:** U.S. students lag behind their peers in other countries in basic educational achievement. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment, U.S. students score in the average range in reading and science, and below average in math –that puts them roughly even with Germany and France and trailing behind China, South Korea, and Japan.ⁱ Meanwhile, in the United States, 857 students drop out of school every hour of every school day.ⁱⁱ
- **Proposals for Consideration:** The Obama Administration has proposed the creation of a Community College to Career Fund to train unemployed workers for high-skilled jobs. Governor Romney has proposed that federal funding for grades K-12 should be linked to individual children, and would permit parents to send their child to any public or charter (and in some cases private) school.ⁱⁱⁱ

What the Presidential Candidates Say:

“Higher education cannot be a luxury reserved for the privileged few. It is an economic necessity for every family, and every family should be able to afford it.”

– Barack Obama, June 2012^{iv}

“Education has to be held at the local and state level, not at the federal level. We need [to] get the federal government out of education.... We looked at what drives good education in our state, what we found is the best thing for education is great teachers.”

– Mitt Romney, January 2012^v

What to Ask Your Congressional Candidates:

What is the best role for the federal government in improving education in this country?

ⁱ "What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science," [Programme for International Student Assessment](#), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009.

ⁱⁱ Research by the nonprofit College Board, reported [in the New York Times](#), 21 June 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gov. Romney's [remarks](#) to the U.S. Chamber Of Commerce, May 23, 2012

^{iv} "President Obama Speaks on Student Loan Interest Rates," President's [remarks](#), June 21, 2012.

^v Mitt Romney, Fox News/Google GOP Presidential [Debate](#), September 22, 2011.