7 Questions About Education for McCain and Obama

By Bruce Mitchell

THOMAS JEFFERSON was one of the main architects of that famous “new world” state which reject-ed the rule of kings and queens in favor of a government by the people. He argued vigorously that in order to make such a governmental structure work, a strong system of public education was a basic prerequisite. Given the various problems which have plagued the nation’s system of public education throughout history, it is critical that all candidates for U.S. president address a number of crucial issues about American education.

Here are seven questions which reporters could use in debates or interviews and individual citizens or educators could use when they encounter a candidate on the campaign trail. If you ask one of these questions of the candidates this fall, please share their answers with Kappan.

#1
One contentious education issue has been the use of public funds to pay for private religious schools. Do you believe that public funds should be used for private religious schools? If so, under what circumstances?

#2
In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that racially segregated schools were “inherently unequal” and therefore unconstitutional. As articulated by researcher Jonathan Kozol in his book, Ordinary Resurrections, some America schools have become resegregated. As president, what would you do to see that American schools comply with the Brown decision?

#3
Many educators have been highly critical of the No Child Left Behind legislation, arguing that it has contributed to the demise of many basic curriculum programs such as music, art, social studies, and physical education. As president, would you be in favor of continuing this program? If so, what changes would you make?

#4
One of the key cabinet positions is the Secretary of Education. As president, what kinds of characteristics would you look for when considering candidates for Secretary of Education?

#5
Research shows that unhealthy children have trouble learning. What would you do to ensure that all American children receive high-quality health care in the schools?

#6
In recent years, businesses and corporations have become involved in various kinds of school programs. As president, what kinds of regulations would you establish for organizations wishing to become involved in public school programs?

#7
Politicians often have ideas about education reform. But as president, how would you include professional educators as decision makers?

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