

## **Public Education: National Values and National Need**

*"The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all." –John F. Kennedy*

*"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."*

*– Thomas Jefferson*

A strong, educated population is a vital national interest. An educated public can make wise decisions on issues of national concern, contribute their skills to the economy, and invent the goods and services of the future that can help strengthen our economy and improve our society, including lessening income inequality.

Despite this common ground, a debate still rages across America's great cities on the future of public education. What model can we use to fix struggling schools, ensure international competition, and confront the growing inequality that threatens to tear apart our diverse nation?

Despite a constant assault from those who would privatize schools and break the backs of public education unions, a quality public education system remains the best hope of the American people. For that reason, fully funding public education is the only course of action for a democratic, economically robust America that ensures that every child has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential.

### **Education, Democracy, and Public Schools**

Public schools are the incubators of democracy. No ill-educated nation has ever preserved its democracy for long, and the quality of education is directly related to a nation's freedom. The only way to guarantee the broadest possible access to these fundamental ideas – these American ideals – is in public

schools open to everyone in our country. Public schools build the nation, bringing together individuals from a variety of backgrounds and newly arrived immigrants, forging them into one American polity. Public schools' non-exclusionary nature, their mission of educating all children, the fact that they are democratically controlled and answerable to the communities in which they are located, and the role of teachers as public servants create a democratic legacy that carries throughout students' lives. Education is strongly linked to membership in social organizations and civic engagement, the backbone of our civic culture.

### **Building America**

America is a fusion of rich and poor, immigrant and native born, and liberal and conservative. In our increasingly politically polarized and economically unequal society, few places remain where people of different classes and backgrounds interact, let alone where they can come and expect to be treated as equals.

Public education remains a bastion of egalitarianism in this regard. Professor Mark Gradstein of Ben-Gurion University writes, "free uniform public education .... creates excessively powerful incentives for cultural assimilation. .... Subsidizing private schooling without regulating its content increases social polarization, which countervails its potential academic benefits."

Simply put, America has been uniquely able to assimilate wave upon wave of immigration, bringing new residents into the cultural fold, absorbing their talents and traditions, in large part because of free universal public education. Thus, a threat to public education also threatens our ability to remain "*E Pluribus Unum*"... out of many, one.

### **Building a Stronger and Fairer Economy**

Working men and women are especially sensitive to the vagaries of the economy. Unemployment rates are nearly double for those who failed to graduate high school. High school dropouts are more likely to wind up in prison and on public assistance. Dropouts are also most likely to come from poor families. While many have been convinced of the benefits of education privatization, workers know better than anyone the danger of turning public services over to corporate interests. Privatized schools claim better educational results, but aren't required to educate all comers and aren't held to the same standards or analysis. They may claim that they have a stronger record on student success, but don't mention that they don't have the same mandate to educate all students, even those who struggle. Indeed, many studies show that, once you take the students served into account, public schools perform as well or better than their private school counterparts. Good, well-funded public schools and good-paying middle class jobs were the

backbones of American success in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they will be the engines of our future prosperity.

### Stopping the Assault against Public Education

To some, the arguments made above will seem obvious. To them, public education is sacrosanct – a costly, but vital investment by

government that goes unquestioned as a national good, just like a strong military defense. But public schools are increasingly under assault. Public school opponents adopt the rhetoric of choice and change, but really seek to privatize and eliminate public education.

Diverting money away from already struggling public schools

shouldn't be an option, and harassing hard working teachers shouldn't be mistaken for strategy or vision. Instead, activists, students, advocates, teachers, and parents are joining together to form a new movement for quality public schools that are open to all, free to all, and provide a quality education for all.

## Jewish Labor Committee

*The Jewish voice in the labor movement, and  
the voice of the labor movement in the Jewish community.*

Founded in 1934, the Jewish Labor Committee was formed to mobilize unions, Jewish organizations and mutual aid societies across North America to help fight Nazism in Germany. The JLC supported anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist forces throughout Europe, and aided Jewish, trade union and democratic socialist leaders targeted by the Nazis.

Today, the JLC brings together the organized labor movement and the organized Jewish community to promote workers' rights, civil rights and human rights in the workplace and the community-at-large; to combat anti-Semitism and all other forms of prejudice; to strengthen the historic relationship between American and Israeli trade unions, and to promote a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Aware of the key role that the labor movement can play to combat income inequality, the JLC mobilizes support in the Jewish community for union activities across the U.S. in support of workers and all others fighting for dignity, security and representation on the job. We are also active in working to increase the minimum wage on the federal and state levels, securing passage of earned sick days legislation, as well as fair and comprehensive national immigration reform.

Together with our partners and supporters, the JLC is committed to creating a fairer and more just society for all.

I would like to join / renew my membership in the Jewish Labor Committee to enable it to grow and continue its important work. *[Please check the appropriate level of membership:]*

- |   |       |   |       |
|---|-------|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining ..... | \$200 | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual .....                   | \$ 40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting ..... | \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Retired Couples .....              | \$ 35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couples .....    | \$ 60 | <input type="checkbox"/> Retired Individuals/Students ..... | \$ 20 |

### PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Name(s) .....  
Address .....  
City ..... State ..... ZIP .....  
Telephone (work/home/cell): ..... / ..... / .....  
Email .....  
Union / Organizational Affiliation ..... / .....

☐ NOTE: I am a teacher / educator

Please mail this form with your check payable to "Jewish Labor Committee" to:

**Jewish Labor Committee ♦ 140 West 31st Street, 3rd Floor ♦ New York, NY 10001**

*You can also pay securely via credit card. For details, call us at 212-477-0707*

