



“65 PERCENT SOLUTION” MOVEMENT THREATENS VITAL PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPPORT SERVICES

A threatening movement is underway at the national level to enact state legislation that would force public school systems to cut essential support services for students, including transportation to and from school, in the name of education reform and enhanced student achievement.

The future of our nation, our economy, and our workforce relies on a strong system of public schools. Ensuring a high-quality education for today’s students begins with teachers but requires the efforts of a team of people providing a full range of services that support and sustain classroom instruction. Public school systems across the country struggle every day to find the right way to divide scarce education resources to meet all federal, state, and local requirements while providing their students with the best educational experience possible.

The “65 Percent Solution,” being promoted by a group called First Class Education, calls for state ballot initiatives or legislation that would mandate that a minimum of 65 percent of school system spending be devoted exclusively to direct spending in the classroom. This smear campaign against public education paints a picture of waste and corruption in public schools and offers an unworkable, one-size-fits-all solution that claims to require no additional resources and no adaptation to local needs.

By employing a highly restrictive and misleading definition of what constitutes “classroom spending,” the 65 percent initiative will force cuts in essential school support services that students and teachers rely on and will mean massive layoffs of school support service personnel such as school bus drivers. For instance, this definition leaves out many vital services that sustain and enhance public schools, including libraries, counseling, school healthcare, bus transportation, teacher training, food and nutrition services, custodial work, maintenance and security. It includes, arbitrarily, certain athletics programs and field trips. The First Class Education initiative is saying America should fund field trips and some sports but slash health care, access to quality libraries, safety, security and transportation to and from schools. This is obviously a movement of extremists wedded to the destruction of our public school systems.

The 65 percent solution is simply another untested proposal that will do nothing to guarantee greater student achievement. A recent report by the nonpartisan school analysis unit of Standard & Poor’s found that many districts that spend less than the magic 65 percent level do quite well on state tests, while others that exceed this level have worse scores. Logic dictates that forcing school districts to cut back or eliminate outside-the-classroom services that promote the health, comfort, and safety of students is counter to the goal of enhancing learning and achievement. Such an arbitrary solution could also disproportionately affect low-income areas, where children depend on schools to provide nutritious meals, counseling, and security as well as impact rural areas, where students depend on their schools to transport them longer distances.

First Class Education is a little known organization, but its backers include familiar names in anti-public education, pro-voucher, and anti-union efforts – and its public relations work is being handled by the same group that created Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. The education of the future working men and women of our nation is too important to allow groups more interested in political scorecards than education policy to shape the debate.

Transportation labor will work with the American Federation of Teachers, the Amalgamated Transit Union, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, National Federation of Public and Private Employees, Transport Workers Union of America, United Transportation Union and other unions to expose First Class Education’s sinister attack on vital public school services and to oppose arbitrary approaches that feed a radical anti-public school agenda while completely missing the point about what public schools and their students and employees need to be effective.

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