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Schliefer: Do you think the federal government should play a larger role in the schools? And I mean, more federal money?

Obama: Well, we have a tradition of local control of the schools and that's a tradition that has served us well But I do think that it is important for the federal government to step up and help local school districts do some of the things they need to do Now we tried to do this under President Bush He put forward No Child Left Behind Unfortunately, they left the money behind for No Child Left Behind And local school districts end up having more of a burden, a bunch of unfunded mandates, the same kind of thing that happened with special education where we did the right thing by saying every school should provide education to kids with speci but we never followed through on the promise of funding, and that left local school districts very cash-strapped So what I want to do is focus on early childhood education, providing teachers higher salaries in exchange for more support Senator McCain and I actually agree on two things that he just mentioned Charter schools, I doubled the number of charter schools in Illinois despite some reservations from teachers unions I think it's important to foster competition inside the public schools And we also agree on the need for making sure that if we have bad teachers that they are swiftly – after given an opportunity to prove themselves, if they can't hack it, then we need to move on because our kids have to have their best future Where we disagree is on the idea that we can somehow give out vouchers – give vouchers as a way of securing the problems in our education system And I also have to disagree on Senator McCain's record when it comes to college accessibility and affordability Recently his key economic adviser was asked about why he didn't seem to have some specific programs to help young people go to college and the response was, well, you know, we can't give money to every interest group that comes along I don't think America's youth are interest groups, I think they're our future And this is an example of where we are going to have to prioritize We can't say we're going to do things and then not explain in concrete terms how we're going to pay for it And if we're going to do some of the things you mentioned, like lowering loan rates or what have you, somebody has got to pay for it It's not going to happen on its own

Schliefer: What about that, Senator?

McCain: Well, sure I'm sure you're aware, Senator Obama, of the program in the Washington, DC school system where vouchers are provided and there's a certain number I think it's a thousand and some and some 9,000 parents asked to be eligible for that Because they wanted to have the same choice that you and I and Cindy and your wife have had And that is because they wanted to choose the school that they thought was best for their children And we all know the state of the Washington, DC, school system That was vouchers That was voucher, Senator Obama And I'm frankly surprised you didn't pay more attention to that example Now as far as the No Child Left Behind is concerned, it was a great first beginning in my view It had its flaws, it had its problems, the first time we had looked at the issue of education in America from a nationwide perspective And we need to fix a lot of the problems We need to sit down and reauthorize it But, again, spending more money isn't always the answer I think the Head Start program is a great program A lot of people, including me, said, look, it's not doing what it should do By the third grade many times children who were in the Head Start program aren't any better off than the others Let's reform it Let's reform it and fund it That was, of course, out-of-bounds by the Democrats

We need to reform these programs We need to have transparency We need to have rewards It's a system that cries out for accountability and transparency and the adequate funding And I just said to you earlier, town hall meeting after town hall meeting, parents come with kids, children – precious children who have autism Sarah Palin knows about that better than most And we'll find and we'll spend the money, research, to find the cause of autism And we'll care for these young children And all Americans will open their wallets and their hearts to do so But to have a situation, as you mentioned in our earlier comments, that the most expensive education in the world is in the United States of America also means that it cries out for reform, as well And I will support those reforms, and I will fund the ones that are reformed But I'm not going to continue to throw money at a problem And I've got to tell you that vouchers, where they are requested and where they are agreed to, are a good and workable system And it's been proven

Obama: I'll just make a quick comment about vouchers in DC Senator McCain's absolutely right: The DC school system is in terrible shape, and it has been for a very long time And we've got a wonderful new superintendent there who's working very hard with the young mayor there to try

McCain: Who supports vouchers

Obama: who initiated – actually, supports charters

McCain: She supports vouchers, also

Obama: But the – but here's the thing, is that, even if Senator McCain were to say that vouchers were the way to go – I disagree with him on this, because the data doesn't show that it actually solves the problem – the centerpiece of Senator That leaves all of you who live in the other 50 states without an education reform policy from Senator McCain So if we are going to be serious about this issue, we've got to have a president who is going to tackle it head-on And that's what I intend to do as president

Schliefer: All right

McCain: Because there's not enough vouchers; therefore, we shouldn't do it, even though it's working I got it

Schliefer: All right Gentlemen, we have come to the close Before I ask both of you for your closing statements tonight, I'd like to invite our viewers and listeners to go to MyDebates.org, where you will find this evening's debates and the three that preceded tonight's debate Now, for the final statements, by a coin toss, Senator McCain goes first