

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

To: Bruce Reed  
Eric Liu

BDUC -

From: Andrew Rotherham

Class size event

Re: Teacher quality-class size event, September 7<sup>th</sup>.

Date: August 30, 1999

We are planning to do an event focusing on teacher quality and class size on Tuesday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of September as part of our "back to school, back to work" message. This event will allow us to highlight both the President's commitment to ensuring that every student has a highly qualified teacher and to reducing class sizes in the early grades. In addition, we will be able to focus attention on the downsides of Republican tax and appropriations proposals. These messages are important and should be highlighted as much as possible during the next few weeks. I've worked closely with Mike Cohen to identify potential sites for this event. We are both convinced, and Secretary Riley concurs, that this event will be substantially more effective if we do it in Columbus, Ohio rather than Montgomery County, Maryland or another suburban D.C. location for the following reasons:

- **A Columbus event will garner much better press attention and show that we are invested in these proposals.** One day after we visit a school district in Virginia as part of our back to school events, visiting a second school in a neighboring state—especially in a suburb of Washington—minimizes rather than maximizes our exposure on this issue. On the heels of an event with union leaders and national elected officials on a slow news day, a smaller-scale event the following day will not get significant press.

By contrast, a trip to Columbus shows that we are serious about these issues and devoting considerable time and effort to them. It sends a signal to the press that these are high priorities for the President. Likewise, high-profile presidential leadership also helps foster Democratic unity on the Hill around this issue. Because the President will release grants to improve teacher quality at this event, a higher-profile event will allow us a better opportunity to showcase this portion of our agenda and make the critical link between investment and accountability.

- **Columbus provides a compelling example of the promise of the President's proposals to reduce class size in the early grades with high-quality teachers.** The Columbus City School District, commonly known as the Columbus Public Schools or CPS, is an excellent place to underscore a number of the President's top education priorities—such as teaching all children to read independently by the end of third-grade, ending social promotion, turning around failing schools, and raising teacher quality—and to demonstrate the critical role that reducing class-size in the early grades can play in helping to achieve these goals. CPS is targeting the class size funds to their lowest performing schools as part of an overall effort to turn them around. CPS used their grant from the President's class size reduction initiative to add 58 teachers in 13 elementary schools. These additional teachers allowed them to reduce class sizes in grades 1-3 by about 10 students per-class to an average of one teacher for 15 students. Most importantly, all of the new teachers are certified. In a recent *Washington Post* editorial "Not Just More Teachers-Better Ones, Too," Rep. George Miller highlighted

his concern about the teacher certification issue. An event in Columbus would be an excellent opportunity to highlight the President's commitment to smaller classes and high quality certified teachers and refute the argument that these are either/or proposals and we should not focus on class size until we have addressed the issue of teacher quality.

CPS also implemented an early reading initiative that incorporates tutors from America Reads, requires schools to adopt one of two proven reading programs—Success for All or Direct Instruction—and ceases to spend resources on failed programs. CPS is also implementing the President's call to end social promotion and views smaller classes as a key component of its efforts to help students meet the third-grade reading standards when they are fully implemented in two years.

The CPS leadership and teachers are enthusiastic about the President's initiatives and supportive of his agenda. This enthusiasm coupled with the results already in place provide an excellent platform for an important "back to school" event.

- **Suburban Washington D.C. districts have had trouble finding qualified teachers.** In the past 2 weeks there have been at least 9 stories in the *Washington Post* either highlighting or mentioning the problems that local school systems are having finding qualified teachers. In Prince George's County the problem has been particularly acute. As a result of aggressive recruiting, the CPS demonstrated that the President's class-size reduction initiative does not exacerbate the shortage of qualified teachers and refutes critics on this point. Conversely, an event in a local school while the press is focused on the teacher shortage here carries with it the risk of calling further attention to this criticism.
- **At least one suburban D.C. education event is almost a certainty during the next 8 to 10 weeks.** Considering the nature of the appropriations and tax issues we will be dealing with over the next few months, it is very likely that we will have to put together events to highlight our education message on short notice in the D.C. area. Rather than use these opportunities now, it makes sense to save them for when there is less time for planning, travel, and development. In addition, the press will be more likely to thoroughly cover local events when the time comes if they are not closely following other events at area schools.
- **The President has done at least 6 education events in Montgomery County during the past few years as well as others in suburban D.C. schools.** The Montgomery County school system is an excellent system with a good story to tell. However, as a result of repeated Presidential visits, both the press and school system officials seem to view Presidential visits as more of a regular occurrence than a truly special and historic opportunity. Visiting new school districts generates excitement among educators and the general public as well as additional press activity, leading to better events.

The importance of these issues both politically and to our education agenda coupled with the noteworthy accomplishments the CPS has made as a result of the President's initiatives and proposals makes CPS a substantially more favorable location for this event, even in light of the additional logistical considerations involved. I believe the circumstances warrant the additional effort.